Tenebrous Femme Fatale

The Making of the Métisse

in Nineteenth-Century Metropolitan French Literature

Susan Weitmann

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Declaration

I declare that this work, which is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, is entirely the result of my own independent research and is wholly my own composition.

I further declare that this thesis has not already been presented in substance for another degree, and will not be submitted for any other degree in this or any other university.

Susan Weitmann

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Abstract

This thesis examines representations of the ‘métisse’ in nineteenth-century metropolitan French literature to determine the figure’s function and significance in the texts that display her and the larger society that imagines her. By ‘métisse’, I refer specifically to a woman of ‘black’ and ‘white’ ‘racial’ mixture whose identity, in the context of the texts that figure her, both legitimates and deconstructs distinct and discrete ‘racial’ identity. As such, she is a useful figure through which to investigate and unpack conceptions of ‘race’. I will suggest that her innate performative ability – a product of her deceptively white exterior – demonstrates the discursive nature of identity that can be seen as constructed and parodied rather than as a simple ontological category. I use the term ‘tenebrous’ to describe the ‘métisse’ because it conjoins the two constitutive aspects of her signification – her ambiguity and her colour. Her fundamentally ambiguous identity is crucial to her figuration as an erotic and dangerous femme fatale. Unknowable and protean, she attracts and simultaneously disconcerts or terrifies her prey. Concurrently, the term ‘tenebrous’ highlights the explicit colouring of her body by all of the authors who imagine her so as to mark her as identifiably different, and to explain her essential bestial, primitive, and dangerous sexuality.

This thesis locates the ‘métisse’ at the crossroads of discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In an era when fears of personal and social degeneracy and decline were capturing the collective imagination, the ‘métisse’, as a figure of frightening alterity and deceptive similitude, embodies deviancy. Primarily portrayed as a natural courtesan due to her essential yet hidden ‘black’ blood, the ‘métisse’ attracts ‘white’ men with her seductive body, but her malign sexuality corrupts, dilutes, or kills them. Associated with the working-class, the prostitute, the criminal, and the savage, the ‘métisse’ fits into a larger discourse that seeks to postulate the normative identity of ‘white’, bourgeois masculinity. Her ability to dilute the ‘purity’ of her ‘white’ male victim articulates a

general contemporary fear of pathological sexuality and, through it, invisible degeneration.

Using the comparative framework of 'case studies', I will examine Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, Arthur Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, Pierre Loti's *Le Roman d'un spahi*, a selection of poems from Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, as well as the critical and biographical studies centring around the figure of Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire's long-time and much-maligned 'métisse' partner. The wide variety of texts and the diverse list of authors will demonstrate the surprising currency of this literary figure in the collective imagination of nineteenth-century metropolitan France, as well as twentieth-century literary criticism. By focussing upon well-known and significant French authors, I will re-examine the cultural heritage to which these writers contributed with specific attention to the investigation of cultural assumptions, desires, and fears pivoting around the theme of mixed-race.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The popular figure of the **'métisse'** *in nineteenth-century metropolitan French literature*

Quand, paresseuse et lasse, à midi je me couche,
Demi-nue, à l'abri sous les feuilles des bois,
Si d'une aile légère un insecte me touche,
Je m'éveille joyeuse, et chagrine à la fois.

Sauvage et jeune encor, moi je ne sais pas feindre;
Mon corps a des contours qui plairaient; mais l'ennui
Me sèche, et je demande un amant pour l'étreindre;
Car, vois-tu, bien souvent j'ai des songes la nuit…

En voyant le bouton de ma gorge naissante
Rougir et palpiter, comme aux vents du matin
Bruit de l'Arbre d'or la feuille éblouissante,
Oh ! je voudrais qu'un Blanc l'effleurât de sa main![1]

Charles Castellan's 1832 poem, 'La Mulâtresse' presents for the reader's delectation a beautiful, primitive, eager, and candid 'mulatta' who calls out for a 'white' lover to satisfy the natural erotic urges that afflict her. The semi-nude unnamed 'woman of colour' displays the contours of her young body with utmost frankness; she speaks candidly about her sexual needs and declares her particular enthusiasm for a 'white man'. In this voyeuristic poem we are presented with a 'mulâtresse' as a quintessential courtesan. She is designed to quench the desire of her intended 'white' reader/lover. She responds sexually at the touch of an insect; she has not been yet schooled in the art of courtly seduction and instead seduces

[1] Charles Castellan, 'La Mulâtresse' in *Les Palmiers* (Gosselin: 1832), 137-38, republished in Léon-François Hoffmann, *Le nègre romantique, 1815-1848* (Paris: Payot, 1973) 249.

from her raw eagerness and unrestrained sexuality. Because of her lack of artifice, her simple nature, and her self-avowed desire for 'white' men, she is a safe and exciting courtesan. This rather simplistic, erotic poem provides us with a starting point for our exploration of French male imaginings of the 'racially-mixed' woman – or '*métisse*' – in nineteenth-century metropolitan France.[2] This poem depicts '*la* mulâtresse' – an archetypal portrait of a 'biracial' woman – whose only function in the poem is to seduce 'white' men through the exhibition of her body. I will suggest over the course of this thesis that the '*métisse*' – in all of her incarnations[3] – becomes the ideal courtesan in the erotic imagination of nineteenth-century France due to her 'réputation de beauté, réputation de légèreté, également'.[4] Both sexually titillating and exotic, and still pale enough to be *apparently* respectable, the '*métisse*' adheres to contemporary racialised aesthetic standards ('white' is beautiful) while retaining the erotic piquancy attached to her 'black' heritage: she is the perfect mistress. To borrow a phrase from Homi Bhabha, the meaning of which will be explored in greater depth in the following chapters, the '*métisse*' is always portrayed as *white but not quite*[5]. Her seemingly 'white' exterior combined with her intrinsic sexuality, a characteristic of her 'black' essence, make her into a popular symbol of *eros* in a wide array of texts and genres that span the nineteenth century. In a colonial adage at the end of the century, the role of the 'mulâtresse' is clearly delineated: 'la blanche pour se marier, la mulâtresse pour forniquer et la négresse pour travailler'. To clarify from the beginning, the term '*métisse*' refers

[2] While Castellan was a native of Mauritius, this poem was published during a sojourn in Paris.

[3] By this I mean the myriad of different terms used to identify various 'racial mixture' of which 'mulâtresse' is but one. This will be discussed in greater depth later in the introduction.

[4] Hoffmann, 248.

[5] Homi K. Bhabha describes colonial mimicry as 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference *that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.' Later, he adjusts the expression to read, '*almost the same but not white'*. While the catchphrase, 'white but not quite' is not found as such in the essay itself, Bhabha does connect these two expressions: 'not quite / not white' and it has been adopted by most scholars to refer to his conception of the 'ambivalence of colonial authority [which] repeatedly turns from *mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite'. 'Of Mimicry and Man' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 86-89. Please note that all italics are original unless otherwise stated.

generically to a woman of 'mixed-race'. For my purposes here, 'race' is defined according to the increasingly strict taxonomy of type as articulated by the likes of George Cuvier and Arthur Gobineau in nineteenth-century France, both of whom will be discussed at greater length in chapter three. Cuvier and Gobineau employed the popular tri-racial model of 'white', 'yellow' and 'black' in their organisation of human difference, and it is using this model that I will address the identity and function of the '*métisse*'. While the term, '*métisse*' generally refers to a woman of any 'interracial mixture', for my purposes she designates a woman specifically of 'black' and 'white' intermixture. Not only have I found this particular 'biracial' woman to be a popular figure in nineteenth-century metropolitan French literature, but also her very existence both depends upon and calls into question the carefully constructed racial binaries of 'black' and 'white'.

The woman in Castellan's poem seduces by her eagerness and naiveté. She guilelessly displays her body in an effort to attract a lover. This portrait emphasises not only the eroticised nature of the '*métisse*', but it also suggests her unthreatening and benign character: she is willing and waiting. However, we will find that in most representations, the '*métisse*' is not without a dangerous edge. Rarely is she guileless, rather she is actively deceptive; and seldom is her seduction benevolent; rather it is either calculating or simply toxic. This is because, I argue, she is made into a symbol of social degeneration – her dangerously seductive body threatens 'white, male purity'; a product of 'racial' mixture, she portends frightening '*métissage*' (interracial sex). Thus, one of the primary issues that I will address is the paradoxical popularity of the '*métisse*' whose seductiveness most often leads to the decline or death of her 'white' lover.

This thesis focuses upon the literary *figure* of the '*métisse*', the way in which she is constructed in literature and popular culture, and *not* upon her as a 'real' person. Indeed, I will question the very foundations upon which her ('racial') identity is articulated. Through the perusal of texts spanning from the early 1800s to the

1880s, I will argue that the figuration of the '*métisse*', which remains remarkably static over the course of the century, reveals the erotic imaginings and obsessive fears of her creators. From the ethnographic study to the popular crime novel; from the 'naturalist' novel to the historiographic essay; and from the colonial novel to poetry, and to subsequent literary criticism; the '*métisse*' is sexualised, essentially ambiguous, and often lethal. I have selected works by Eugène Sue, Charles Baudelaire, Émile Zola, Arthur Gobineau, and Pierre Loti, all of whom are well known figures in nineteenth-century French literature and most of whom were famous (albeit occasionally notorious) during their lifetimes. In and around these extremely varied works, I will show the surprising prevalence of this 'racially-mixed' woman who becomes a symbol of destructive – and often lethal – sexuality.

The '*métisse*' as an object of desire, as a body whose 'truth' is to be unveiled through the mechanism of vision seems to be a primarily male imagining. As I have already said, the '*métisse*' functions in most narratives as a natural courtesan, and often as a kind of racialised *femme fatale*. The desire that she stokes is a primary aspect of her characterisation and thus implies in the narrative a male gaze upon her body that is tied up in both erotic and epistemophilic urges. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud suggests that sexual desire and the desire to know are both linked through vision. The narratives under examination here all foreground the gaze, which is concerned with the unveiling of the '*métisse*', revealing her identity, her essence, and simultaneously enjoying the promise of her erotic display.[6] These authors foreground the body of the '*métisse*' in an effort both to illuminate the 'racial' and 'sexual' alterity that she embodies, as well as to enjoy the exotic titillation that she provides. The authority of the (male) narrative voice is rarely questioned within the text and thus, definitions of 'gender' and 'race' are

[6] See Peter Brooks, *Body Work. Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

maintained in seemingly transparent prose.[7] While I have argued that the '*métisse*' seems to be primarily a male imagining, the notable exception is, of course, George Sand, whose books *Tamaris* and *La filleule* both feature '*métisse*' characters but not of the kind that interest us in this thesis.[8] Furthermore, Sand's destabilisation of male narrative authority – particularly in the case of *La filleule*, which includes a first-person voice of the gypsy girl in journal form – undermines the totalising narratives of 'race' and 'sexuality' that we witness in all of the male-authored texts under examination in this work. While 'race', as such, is not a primary focus of Sand's oeuvre, her questioning of the patriarchal modes of discourse that define categories of gender suggest an interest in the subversion of the traditional vector of male gaze upon proffered female body that redefines identity beyond essentialising stereotype.[9] While I believe that a study of Sand's particular figuration of the '*métisse*' would be of great interest, I find that it is outside the scope of my current interest – namely French male imaginings of the '*métisse*' whose body becomes the locus of taxonomic and erotic signification.

In an era that produced such a staggering array of 'racial' theories and taxonomies, which strove to delineate and fix 'racial' difference, the '*métisse*' may seem like an unlikely popular erotic figure. '*Métisse*' signifies a woman of 'racial mixture' and as such, she could be seen as a figure that blurs the boundaries of 'racial' difference. Furthermore, as a product of 'interracial' sex as well as a *natural* courtesan for 'white' men, she could be seen as a mechanism that generates further obfuscation of seemingly visible 'racial' alterity. Conversely, her identity premised upon 'race amalgamation' also substantiates prior 'racial purity': the

[7] We will find in our reading of Baudelaire's Les Bijoux' in chapter five an unsettling of narrative control over the erotic female object that suggests a more complicated relationship between white male/coloured female and object/subject.

[8] In *Tamaris*, the character, Nama is half French and half Indian. In *La filleule*, the character, Morena is a gypsy.

[9] For more on Sand's narrative voices and her challenges of gender categories, see Françoise Massardier-Kenney's *Gender in the Fiction of George Sand* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), Isabelle Hoog Naginski's *George Sand. Writing for Her Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), and Nigel Harkness's *Gendered Discourse: narrative voices in the novels of George Sand* (Edinburgh, PhD diss, 1997).

product of 'black' and 'white', she gives corporeal proof that 'races' can 'mix', or rather that they can both exist simultaneously in one body. Situated between the 'racial' poles of 'black' and 'white', the '*métisse*' is simultaneously a figure of essential alterity and deceptive similarity. A physical substantiation of 'hybridity', and also proof of former 'purity', the figure of the '*métisse*' demonstrates the ambiguous and mutually constitutive relationship between the two terms.[10] As Werner Sollors, scholar of African-American Studies, suggests, 'The hackneyed notion of 'pure blood' always rests on the possibility and the reality of 'mixed blood' – though violent 'cleansing' may be deemed necessary to constitute 'purity'. The time may have come to stop avoiding the interracial theme in literature, to investigate it, and to unpack its semantic fields'.[11]

If one peruses French literary representations of 'the woman of colour' throughout the nineteenth century, one finds a wide array of terms meant to designate her including – but not limited to – 'mulâtresse', 'quarteronne', 'terceronne', 'quinteronne', 'griffe', and 'créole', each of which is meant to designate the proportions of 'white' and 'black' blood beneath the surface.[12] As we will discover, often these terms are used interchangeably in such a way as to vociferously establish difference, while at the same time demonstrate the ambiguity at the heart of 'race' stereotype. These labels, as we will see, do not correspond to easily discernible 'colours': an oft-remarked quandary is the near impossibility of identifying a 'sang-mêlé'. Such inscrutable sameness provokes intense fears of difference. Jennifer DeVere Brody in her examination of 'blackness' in Victorian literature and culture, coins her own term for this

[10] Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).
[11] Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 3-4.
[12] Generally, 'mulâtresse' describes a woman of half 'white blood' and half 'black'. 'Terceronne' would be one-third 'black', and two-thirds 'white', and so on. See J.J. Virey's *Histoire naturelle du genre humaine* (Paris: Crochard, 1824) 186 for a graph of racial mixture. See also Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry's graphing of categories of racial mixture on Saint-Domingue in his *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, vol. 1 (1797 reprint Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outremer, 1984) 86-100.

ambiguous 'woman of colour' – 'mulattaroon' – as a way to demonstrate the invented nature of an identity premised purely on the fiction of pigment.[13] However, I have decided to use the more general and ambiguous term, '*métisse*' to refer to all of these women of varying racial percentages of 'black' and 'white'. In this way, I hope to signal the constructedness of all of these 'racial' appellations while avoiding the urge to add my own potentially 'racialist' classificatory label to the long list. Thus far, I have signalled the discursive nature of 'race' through the deployment of quotation marks. I ask the reader to assume the maintenance of this technique if henceforward it is unacknowledged, fully aware that it is difficult to speak of 'race' without reifying or naturalising it by the very act of naming it.

This thesis attempts to chart the figuration of the *métisse* in its investigation and semantic 'unpacking' of race, and her location at the juncture of intersecting discourses of race, class, gender and sexuality. It explores the process of stereotype, which attempts to affix upon terrifying uncertainty a false stability that must be constantly reiterated. As such, the stereotyping of the *métisse* is fraught with contradiction: it must articulate the fundamental alterity of the subject while simultaneously presenting the subject as entirely comprehensible and identifiable. In Homi Bhabha's examination of stereotype in colonial discourse, he highlights the perpetual, ambivalent sliding between the poles of similarity and difference. 'Colonial discourse produces the colonised as a fixed reality, which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible. […] It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth that is structurally similar to realism.'[14] The obsession with distinguishing the traits and qualities 'inherent' to the *métisse* runs concurrently with the admission that these attributes are practically impossible to discern. Her ambiguity – her ability to 'pass' as white – exposes a paradoxical disjunction in the discourse that creates her. We will find that throughout the

[13] Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998) 16.
[14] Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism', *The Location of Culture*, 71.

century, this supposed rupture between 'appearance' and 'reality' manifests itself in the portrait of the duplicitous *métisse*, well schooled in the art of deception and performance. Her racial uncertainty translates into a conscious and frightening ability to dupe the unwitting eye of her white male victim.

I suggest that the *métisse* is situated at the crossroads of discourses on sexuality and on personal and social degeneration. Her danger lies in her racial indeterminateness and her ability to 'corrupt' or 'dilute' the purity of her white male victim through her naturally powerful seduction arsenal, and consequently the larger society. The product of illicit and decadent interracial sex, she is reduced to a sexualised being who functions primarily as a temptress of white men. Shrouded in ambiguity, the *métisse* is simultaneously desired and abhorred; she seduces her male lover and in the process, threatens his sexuality and the integrity of his racial superiority. In a century obsessed with the fear of degeneracy, the *métisse* becomes a linchpin that ties together various strands of discourses on race, class, and gender. Social hierarchies that connect by metaphor 'coloured', 'female', and 'plebeian' in such a way as to articulate through difference the bourgeois identity of white masculinity, profit from the figure of the *métisse* who links them together. Ann Laura Stoler rightly claims, 'There is no bourgeois identity not contingent on a changing set of Others who are at once desired and repugnant, forbidden and subservient, cast as wholly different but also the same'.[15] It is in this framework that the *métisse* becomes an example of threatening alterity and *métissage* regarded as a dangerous form of subversion that threatens white prestige and results in European degeneration and moral decomposition.

Degeneracy, the deviation from a standard of normality (generally considered to be white/male/bourgeois), becomes the biological foundation upon which social exclusionary practices are based. Supposedly caused by social or physical agents,

[15] Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) 193.

or moral transgressions, degeneracy infects the individual and through the inexorable force of heredity can contaminate the larger society. What made the conception of degeneracy so threatening was its invisible nature, the fact that 'external features were not reliable indicators of its existence'.[16] If degeneracy was considered so dangerous because of its capability to encroach upon distinguishable identity, as Daniel Pick and others have suggested, then who could be more dangerous to the dissolution of white, bourgeois, masculine purity than a woman whose racial alterity is practically invisible?[17] She becomes a symbol for a kind of lethal sexuality that recasts difference as pathology.[18] At the heart of human sexual pathology is the fear of primitive tendencies toward perversion hidden within man and society. This notion of inherent primitivism, a hereditary retrogression that threatens the very lifeblood of European superiority finds a corporeal form in the *métisse*. The superimposition of a white complexion upon a primitive black 'essence' provides a physical metaphor for indiscernible degeneracy. Further, the hereditary transmission of degeneration turns the *métisse* into a mechanism of its expansion.

Structuring Our Readings of the Métisse

This thesis is organised around a series of 'case studies' that examine French metropolitan male imaginings of the *métisse* over the course of the nineteenth century. These case studies will provide us with a comparative framework within which patterns of representation can be scrutinised and understood as part of a broader historico-literary context. We will see similar imagery, vocabulary, and thematic choices reverberate throughout the span of our textual examination.

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[16] Zine Magubane, 'Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the "Hottentot Venus"' in *Gender and Society*, vol. 15, no. 6 (December 2001): 816-834; 820.

[17] Ibid. See as well Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c.1918* (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sidney: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[18] See Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985) 3.

Moreover, each case study allows us to examine from different angles the recurring figure of the *métisse*, whose role is adapted to the demands of each text's genre and context. While my broader research includes readings that cover the whole of the century and include literary criticism from the twentieth century, the primary texts span approximately forty years – from the 1840s to the 1880s. I have restricted myself to this timeframe for two principal reasons: first, I believe that while definitions of the *métisse* were being formulated at the turn of the century in such works as Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry's 1797 *Déscription topographique, physique, civile, politique, et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, it was not until mid-century that the popularisation of the *métisse* as a stock figure became firmly entrenched in contemporary metropolitan literature; second, the forty years in question produced an extremely varied literary aesthetic – romanticism, naturalism, symbolism etc. – and by comparing and contrasting the figuration of the *métisse* as she is inscribed in a variety of texts from a range of genres, I hope to demonstrate her currency in the literary and cultural imagination of nineteenth-century metropolitan France.

I have chosen to examine the works of Eugène Sue, Charles Baudelaire, Émile Zola, Arthur Gobineau, and Pierre Loti not only because the depiction of the *métisse* from such a diverse group of writers demonstrates her surprising prevalence, but also because these writers' works were widely known and read. Eugène Sue's *roman feuilleton* was one of the most popular novels of its time; Pierre Loti was a widely-read author who is still popular today; Charles Baudelaire and Émile Zola – both considered to be significant and obscene by their contemporaries – have entered the canonical annals of French literature; and even Gobineau, whom the French might like to forget they produced, has become a notorious figure forever associated with the Nazism that adopted him. These writers were influential in the production and popularisation of the *métisse*. Further, the fact that they all chose to portray her in their works suggests the extent to which she was already a widely acknowledged figure of the era. My intent here

is to re-examine the cultural heritage to which these writers contributed with an eye toward an investigation of the critical cultural assumptions, fears and desires centred upon the theme of mixed-race. [19]

Instead of positioning myself in line with a particular theory, I have benefited from an engagement with feminist theory, postcolonial theory, poststructuralist theory and film theory, as well as from a textually based critique. My subject demanded this varied approach in order to draw out all of the issues raised by the figure of the *métisse*. Carole Boyce Davies refers to this as the 'visitor theory' approach in the sense that it offers a 'technique of interaction' or a 'critical relationality in which various theoretical positions are interrogated for their specific applicability to Black women's experiences and textualities and negotiated within a particular inquiry with a necessary eclecticism'.[20] I believe that any examination of the representation of the *métisse* figure, whose fluid and paradoxical nature calls into question rigid categorisation, must be approached through a process that maintains contingency and ambiguity. As such, I decided that the most productive way to approach the *métisse* was by moving between different theoretical vantage points, negotiating between various discourses that would offer what Davies calls a 'complexly-integrated and relational theoretics'.[21] What could be more appropriate when examining the construction of a figure whose identity is seen to be

[19] For an interesting examination of the recuperation of and the renewed interest in the term '*métissage*' in current French cultural discourse, see Jennifer Yee's article, '*Métissage* in France: a postmodern fantasy and its forgotten precedents' in *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2003): 411-425. Yee argues that in the last decade, France has turned away from multiculturalism – what it believes to be a discredited approach – and toward the conception of *métissage* as a utopian vision, which will bring equality through mixing. Behind this vision, however, is, as Yee puts it 'the spectre of the imperialist recuperation of interracial breeding suggested by some thinkers at the end of the 19th century', 422. In chapter three we will see in the work of Arthur Gobineau, *métissage* described as a necessary evil, the mechanism by which civilisations are created (and paradoxically, that by which they will degenerate). Ernest Renan, a contemporary of Gobineau, is even more positive regarding the process of *métissage*, which he sees as regenerative and restorative. Yee argues that '"the bon usage sexuel" of the "Other" that was suggested but not accomplished within the older, more explicitly biological model of *métissage* is echoed in today's ideal', 422.

[20] Carole Boyce Davies, 'Negotiating Theories or "Going a Piece of the Way with Them"', *Black Women, Writing, and Identity* 38-58 (London: Routledge, 1994) 46.

[21] Ibid. 56.

transgressive and changeable than a critical approach that proposes a multiplicity of articulations? Trinh T. Minh-ha writes that '"theory" is suspicious when it loses sight of its own conditional nature, takes no risk in speculation, and circulates a form of administrative inquisition. Theory oppresses, when it wills or perpetuates existing power relations, when it presents itself as a means to exert authority – the Voice of Knowledge'.[22] This thesis interrogates the discourses that underpin the figuration of the *métisse*; it queries their implicit totality and their authority in constructing and enforcing identity. It does this by moving between different theoretical positions to forge meaningful relational connections that are contingent and contextual; it does not suppose rigid singularity or closure, but is rather interested in the speculative and the open-ended.

In chapter two, I frame my examination by performing a comparative study of Eugène Sue's extremely popular 1843 roman feuilleton, *Les Mystères de Paris*, and Pierre Loti's hugely successful 1881 colonial novel, *Le Roman d'un spahi*. These two texts – separated by almost forty years – create remarkably similar portraits of the *métisse*. By comparing the depictions of two *métisse* secondary characters, this chapter examines some of the foundational qualities that form the stereotype of the *métisse*, which will be reiterated in the intervening texts. This chapter is primarily interested in conceptions of gaze, performance and power, and it borrows from feminist film criticism in its utilisation of Laura Mulvey's model of the (white) male gaze upon the (coloured) female body. In addressing themes of 'passing' and exhibition, the chapter also refers to Judith Butler's concept of performativity and Homi Bhabha's idea of mimicry, stressing the discursive identity of the *métisse*. While I note the striking similarity of depictions in two texts separated by almost forty years, I stress the important shifts occurring in Loti's colonial narrative suggest a tightening of racial boundaries, which force an

[22] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native Other. Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 42, cited by Davies, 43.

expunging of any racial ambiguity that might be seen to threaten the force or integrity of the colonial imperative.

In chapter three, I study Arthur Gobineau's 1854 *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, which provides the theoretical foundations for our examination. His essay is a fascinating historical doomsday treatise in which he expounds upon his vision of the deterioration of humanity resulting from miscegenation. The primary focus of the essay is upon the decay and decadence of the white race through racial mixture, and the nostalgic longing for a distant and decidedly aristocratic utopia in which the white race preserved the qualities that make it superior. In order to account for the decline of civilisation, Gobineau fashions a racial theory founded upon the intermeshing of gender, race, and class metaphors to account for the positional superiority of whiteness/masculinity/aristocracy. The *métisse* is a structurally ambiguous figure in the *Essai*: a symbol of unity and destruction, the most desirable product of an ultimately doomed sexual enterprise, she demonstrates Gobineau's ambivalence toward the whole conception of *métissage*. The tragic ramifications of what she represents – which reverberate in all of the texts under examination – are presented to us here as historical inevitability.

Chapter four examines Émile Zola's 1867 novel, *Thérèse Raquin* which locates itself within a naturalist rhetoric that utilises a racial typology – linking race, gender, and class – to achieve a 'scientific' examination of character and behaviour. In this way, Zola illustrates a vision of determinist heredity and degenerative sexuality that does not differ substantially in content from Gobineau. I will suggest that Zola relies on degeneracy discourse and conceptions of lethal sexuality in the portrayal of his eponymous *métisse* protagonist. However, not only does Zola profit from contemporary 'scientific' discourse that provides him with a positivist veneer for his ostensible case study, he also draws on a more macabre aesthetic that centres on depictions of depravity, violence and death. These two simultaneous threads of 'naturalism' and 'romanticism' run through the novel and

result in the depiction of Thérèse as pathological, as a deviation from the normative, *and* as a symbol of decadence, an object whose very perverseness is the essence of its strong seductive power. In this chapter, I will address the motif of dangerous (indeed, lethal) sexuality that will gain in popularity by the end of the century. To do this, I will compare and contrast two figures of excessive sexuality: the racialised woman and the prostitute. I will compare Thérèse to Nana, both Zolean characters whose heredity determines their uninhibited sexuality and prostitution. Thérèse, a bourgeois *métisse* and Nana, a white lower-class woman are linked by their excessive sexuality that escapes the confines of 'normal', 'healthy' sexuality.

Finally, chapter five will interrogate the mythology of Jeanne Duval, Charles Baudelaire's long-time *métisse* mistress whose myth seems at times to overshadow both the poet and his most famous work, *Les Fleurs du Mal*. I will examine the shadowy figure of Jeanne based upon contradictory contemporary accounts and often salacious biographical and critical commentary from the 1870s until today. I will also scrutinise the process that conflated Jeanne with the 'Vénus noire', a figure of licentiousness that became emblazoned upon Baudelaire's most sensual and carnal poems. Whereas previous chapters will focus upon the *métisse within* a text, this chapter will study also the process by which a real woman becomes a symbol that is then inscribed *upon* a text. In other words, while the previous chapters have moved from the text outward, this chapter will observe the opposite process. The central object of this thesis is to examine the representation of the *métisse* as a literary mechanism for articulations of gender and racial identity and sexuality in nineteenth-century metropolitan France, rather than as an historical reality. In this chapter, I will study the very ambivalent meeting of poetry and historical biography through the person of Jeanne Duval. This chapter will have two functions. First, it will demonstrate the evolution of stereotype. It will show the progression by which Jeanne Duval moved from a physical person to a sign of race and a symbol of (sexual) depravity. Second, it will serve to implicate readers

in the process of gender and racial construction by asking the self-reflexive question: how do we read or perceive a text and what is our role in the production of mythology and stereotype?

The Implication of Our Readings of the Métisse

My objective in asking these questions is to acknowledge the responsibility of the reader in the creation of meaning as s/he interprets the text and determines signification. Philip Culbertson argues, 'What we are able to see, value, and respond to in a text is socially constructed, and the meaning we draw from whatever we encounter is a priori resident within – generated by – ourselves, and shaped by the complex interaction of culture, life experience, and individual need'.[23] The sense here, then, is that a text is not the only source of inherent meaning but 'has as many possible meanings as its readers bring to it'.[24] Certainly, the creation of the Jeanne Duval/'Vénus noire' figure and then its positioning upon a selection of Baudelaire's poetry suggest the powerful role of readership in the construction and maintenance of conceptions of gender, race, and sexuality. However, in a more general way, I wish to signal the intimate relationship between the narrative display of the coloured female object in the text, and our reading of *that* woman in *that* text. There is an unavoidable implication of the reader in this whole process: we scrutinise, we imagine, we dissect the exhibited bodies before us, and even if our desire is to destabilise the racialist frameworks that support their articulation, we run the risk of 'revaluating' them through our *re*articulation.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is not only to critically examine literary representations of the *métisse*, but also to engage seriously with our role as readers of race, gender, and class difference. How do we cast difference? And what are our

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[23] Philip Culbertson, 'Redesigning Men: Reading the Male Body as Text', *The Journal of Textual Reasoning*, vol.7 (1998), accessed 10 May 2006 from http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/tr/archive/volume7/Culbertson1.html.
[24] Ibid.

cultural assumptions when we read bodies of difference? The figure of the *métisse* as she is inscribed upon and displayed in various texts provides us with an opportunity to explore these questions regarding our involvement in the production and maintenance of stereotype, as we simultaneously undertake an investigation of the function of the *métisse* figure within her textual universe and the broader cultural context of nineteenth-century France. How is she imagined and constructed, and to what end? Does her function change over time, and if so, why? What does her figuration tell us about the implicit suppositions of her authors, and about the larger society that popularised her?

Chapter Two

Gazing Upon the *Métisse*: Voyeurism, Performance, and Power

This chapter will examine the depictions of two secondary characters in Eugène Sue's 1843 *Les Mystères de Paris* and Pierre Loti's 1881 *Le Roman d'un spahi* – two novels whose form and genre differ substantially and are separated by around forty years.[25] In fact, the only thing that links these two novels is their use of the stock figure of the seductive and dangerous *métisse*. By conducting a comparative analysis of the representation and function of these characters in their respective narratives, this chapter will explore the theme of voyeurism and its potential for racial duping and unmasking in the representation of mixed-race women in nineteenth-century France, and the connected themes of performative *métissage* and unequal power relations. I argue that both Sue and Loti utilise remarkably similar stereotypes of the *métisse* but with very distinctive ends that suggest that whereas racial hybridity in Sue's novel functions primarily as a metaphor for deception and performance, in Loti's Manichean colonial novel, hybridity is an anathema that must be excised. Sue's novel, with its reestablishment of social justice and order through the righteous and deft efforts of the protagonist, creates a comic effect that shapes the depiction of his *métisse* character, Cecily, into a tool of justice. Loti's tragic tale of racial transgression, corruption, and death implicates his character, Cora as both an embodiment of the threat of miscegenation and the catalyst for the protagonist's lethal lapse. Focussing upon power, performance, and sight, this chapter will trace the signification of the *métisse* and her functional value in two distinctive texts.

[25] Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris*, 4 vol. (Paris: Librarie de Charles Gosselin, 1843) and Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d'un spahi*, ed. Bruno Vercier (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

The trope of vision – to see or be seen, to hide or deceive, to scrutinise and identify, and to unmask – is a most important element in all representations of the *métisse*.[26] Whether the narrative invites titillating voyeurism and/or whether the narrator seeks to attach an immutable identity to his *métisse* character in an attempt to convey truth or excavate difference in the name of science or ethnology, the formal narrative maintains control over the *métisse*: she is the object to be watched and/or lusted after. Here it may be useful to turn to Laura Mulvey's essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in which she posits her conception of gendered viewing.[27] Using Freud's term, scopophilia – the desire to see – which is sexual in origin, Mulvey argues that in a sexually imbalanced world, pleasure in looking has been split between the active/male and the passive/female.

> This determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as a sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle.[28]

However, in Mulvey's thesis a racial component is absent. What we find in these novels is that inextricably tied up with the male gaze upon the female object is the fact that the gaze is white and that the object is coloured. The women on display are not simply sexual objects: *colour* informs both their sexual objectification and

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[26] Indeed, the 'display' of non-Europeans as specimens of the 'exotic' is a central element of nineteenth-century metropolitan culture and reveals an obsession with enframing the world, and certain peoples, as a collection of objects to be scrutinised and catalogued. On the subject see Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988).

[27] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 14-26. In the preface to this collection of essays, Mulvey acknowledges that this particular essay, 'written polemically and without regard for context and nuances of argument…has acquired a balloon-like, free-floating quality' (vii-viii). While the essay has been challenged for its supposed misreading of Lacan, its silence on the role of the female spectator and female protagonist, and its failure to take into account the intersections between race and sexuality, I believe that it still has a role to play in the examination of voyeurism in literature and literary theory.

[28] Ibid. 19.

their display. While neither woman is a courtesan *per se*, both are suggestively linked to prostitution – Cora more explicitly than Cecily. Etymologically, *prostituer* means 'to expose or display in public'. In this sense, both Cora and Cecily enact prostitution by the way in which they are displayed as dangerously titillating objects to be viewed by the male characters and the reader.[29] The narrative eye that roves delectably over the displayed female sexual body does so with full knowledge that this body is different, that it is tinted/tainted. The scophophilic eye is concurrently a naturalist eye, attempting to ascertain the precise measure of difference by tracking the ostensibly visible racial 'clues' to identity. In the process of gazing, the piercing narrative eye constructs the *métisse* character by colouring her. She is what can be visually perceived, if only by an expertly trained eye.

While formal ocular control is maintained over the coloured female object, in both narratives the *métisse* seductress exerts a particular form of power over her white male partner. She is sophisticated and corruptive; a courtesan by nature, adept in inciting lust and capturing the mind and body of her prey. Her power comes from her (implied) natural ability to perform, to dupe and deceive. Her almost-white exterior hides her essential, coloured character, which is both the source of her erotic power and also of her mortal danger. Léon-François Hoffmann writes of the mulâtresse in his influential book, *Le nègre romantique*, 'La sensualité lascive des Nègres coule dans leurs veines, mais raffinée par l'apport blanc, humanisée, parée des charmes de conversation et de l'élégance du vêtement. La Mulâtresse est la maîtresse idéale proposée à l'imagination érotique du Français moyen'.[30] Both Sue and Loti rely upon this image of the *métisse* as supreme courtesan.[31] But this very

[29] For more on the relationship between the *métisse* and the prostitute, see chapter three's comparative exposition of Thérèse Raquin and Nana.
[30] Hoffmann, 248.
[31] Moreau de Saint-Méry, in his study of the inhabitants of Saint-Domingue, describes the mulâtresse thus: 'L'être entier d'une Mulâtresse est livré à la volupté, & le feu de cette Déesse brûle dans son cœur pour ne s'y éteindre qu'avec la vie. […] Charmer tous les sens, les livrer aux plus délicieuses extases, les suspendre par les plus séduisans ravissemens: voilà son unique étude; & la

enticing white veneer of beauty, refinement, and charm is double-edged: it contains the possibility of subversive race passing and suggests that 'colour…or ethnicity can be performed, enacted, donned or discarded'.[32] Cecily and Cora can pass for white, despite rather hysterical narrative observations to the contrary. Both seduce their victims through clever performance. Both men find themselves intoxicated by the sensual power of the two women, and in these brief amorous interludes, power is reversed: master-servant and conqueror-conquered roles are inverted. However, both novels structurally deny power to these women, who are isolated and solitary, and who are banished from the narrative after they have been sufficiently looked at and their role of seductress has been accomplished.

The Presentation of Cecily[33]

Les Mystères de Paris, Sue's sensationalist mystery/crime novel is melodramatic with its bloodcurdling stories of villainy, murder, and conspiracy. Its central intrigue revolves around the retributive power of the protagonist as he rights the wrongs of a corrupt society. Cecily is a minor character in the grand scheme of Sue's sprawling *roman feuilleton*: she makes her first appearance only in the third of four volumes. Nevertheless, her notoriety as an 'audacieuse métisse' far precedes her. As early as the first volume, we learn of her treachery, depravity, and remarkable beauty. The greater her physical beauty, the stronger the correlation to her diabolical nature: 'cette créature, aussi belle que pervertie, aussi enchanteresse que dangereuse'.[34] As one character observes, 'une âme perverse sous de gracieux

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nature, en quelque sorte, complice du plaisir, lui a donné charmes, appas, sensibilité, & ce qui est bien plus dangereux, la faculté d'éprouver encore mieux que celui avec qui elle les partage, des jouissances dont le code de Paphos ne renfermait pas tous les secrets.' *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue*, 1: 92.

[32] Elaine K. Ginsberg, ed., 'Introduction', *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, 1-18 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 4.

[33] The first chapter in which Cecily is brought into the home of the novel's villain, Jacques Ferrand is entitled, 'Présentation', which denotes both an introduction and also a display or a *spectacle.*

[34] Sue, 3: 242.

dehors me cause toujours une double horreur.'[35] Already the disjunction between an alluring exterior and a corrupt interior suggests a natural deception that is intrinsic to Cecily's persona. In a chapter entitled, 'Histoire de David et de Cecily', her role as a contentious object of male desire is firmly established. During her time as a slave on a Floridian plantation, her physical beauty attracts both the slave doctor, David, and their owner, the evil Mr. Willis, who has 'une fantaisie de sultan pour cette jeune fille'.[36] Cecily's persistent refusal of Willis's advances, and David's request for permission to marry her, enrage Willis who responds by installing Cecily in his harem ('sérail') and severely punishing the impudence of David for attempting to wrest away his master's new courtesan. Once she and David have been rescued from the plantation by the novel's protagonist, the noble prince Rodolphe, and brought to Europe, they are married. However, it is not long before Cecily's natural instincts lead her to commit adultery against her husband, which opens the door to endless scandal.

> Rougissant dans ce monde nouveau d'être mariée à un nègre, Cecily, séduite par un homme d'ailleurs horriblement dépravé, commit une première faute; on eût dit que la perversité naturelle de cette malheureuse, jusqu'alors endormie, n'attendait que ce dangereux ferment pour se développer avec une effroyable énergie. Vous savez le reste, le scandale de ses aventures.[37]

However, since we do not know the rest – no other scandal or incident is mentioned with regard to Cecily – we must believe the narrator's assertion that the infamies of Cecily were so egregious in nature that they prompted her husband, David to wish his wife dead. It is only at the 'magnanimous' behest of their employer/master, Rodolphe, that Cecily is merely imprisoned for life in a fortress in Germany. It is from this life sentence that Cecily is briefly released so that she

[35] Ibid. 1: 162.
[36] Ibid. 1: 165.
[37] Ibid. 1: 169.

can perform her master's act of vengeance upon his mortal enemy, the avaricious and debauched notary, Jacques Ferrand.

Ferrand has been the author of numerous crimes over the course of the novel; however his calculated cruelty has been so well hidden under a mask of propriety that he has duped almost everyone. Only the penetrating eye of Rodolphe and the omniscient narrator see past the hypocritical façade of respectability to the murderous criminal beneath. How to pierce the mask? How to expose the villain? We learn that Ferrand has one weakness: 'une seule passion…ou plutôt un seul appétit, mais honteux, mais ignoble, mais presque féroce dans son animalité, l'exaltait souvent jusqu'à la frénésie…C'était la luxure. La luxure de bête, la luxure du loup ou du tigre'.[38] To punish a lust-filled man, a lust-inducing woman is required. Who better than a woman whose perversity is attached inextricably to her good looks, a woman who belongs to a species of female identified by its base and animalistic sexuality? A skilled and diabolical courtesan, Cecily is, we are told, the appropriate instrument of just punishment for the lustful and depraved Ferrand quite simply because her type personifies brute sexuality. 'Il faut dire…si elles n'inspirent qu'éloignement, que répugnance aux hommes doués de sentiments tendres et élevés, de goûts délicats et épurés, les femmes de l'espèce de Cecily exercent une action soudaine, une omnipotence magique sur les hommes de sensualité brutale tels que Jacques Ferrand.'[39] Indeed, we will find that Cecily's particular brand of lust has no effect upon the noble and refined spirit of the prince Rodolphe, who can see past her seductive power to her homicidal potential, both of which are inextricably linked to her identity as a *fille de couleur*, a *métisse*.

> Tout le monde a entendu parler de ces filles de couleur pour ainsi dire *mortelles* aux Européens, de ces vampires enchanteurs qui, enivrant leur victime de séductions terribles, pompent jusqu'à sa dernière goutte d'or et de sang, et ne lui

[38] Ibid. 2: 173.
[39] Ibid. 3: 288.

> laissent, selon l'expression du pays, que ses larmes à boire, que son cœur à ronger. Telle est Cecily.[40]

Not only is Cecily's species of woman likened to vampires, it also appears to possess a kind of sexual sorcery that proves fatal to a certain type of lascivious man.

> Du premier regard ils devinent ces femmes, ils les convoitent; une puissance fatale les attire auprès d'elles, et bientôt des affinités mystérieuses, des sympathies magnétiques sans doute, les enchaînent invinciblement aux pieds de leur monstrueux idéal; car elles seules peuvent apaiser les feux impurs qu'elles allument.[41]

As a coloured girl, Cecily is a *femme fatale* whose vampire tendencies destroy her white male victim. To substantiate Cecily's membership of this dangerous species of 'vampires enchanteurs', she is described thus: 'Qu'on s'imagine donc cette figure incolore, avec son regard tout noir qui étincelle, et ses deux lèvres rouges, lisses, humides, qui luisent comme du corail mouillé.'[42] Her pallid face emphasises her blood-red mouth, which suggests what Jean de Palacio terms 'la féminité dévorante'.[43] Palacio notes the prevalence of the motif of the sexually metonymic female mouth that serves to underscore woman's primordial vocation to eliminate, devour, and reabsorb the masculine.[44] While Palacio's work deals with the Decadent figure in French *fin-de-siècle* literature, his examination of this particular derivation of the *femme fatale* applies quite nicely to Sue's depiction of Cecily. However, she is more dangerous than her 'pareilles' because unlike them, she does

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[40] Ibid. 3: 286.
[41] Ibid. 3: 288.
[42] Ibid. 3: 286.
[43] Jean de Palacio, *Figures et Formes de la Décadence* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Séguier, 1994) 54-66.
[44] Ibid. This image of ingestion is used to great effect in Victor Joseph Etienne de Jouy's *L'Hermite de la Chaussée d'Antin* in which he describes Isabeau 'cette belle mulâtresse' as having a talent for attracting attention and in particular, 'de manger, en cinq ans, le fonds de deux riches habitations, et de ruiner en moins de temps encore trois grands seigneurs, cinq maitres des requêtes et quatre fermiers-généraux'. *L'Hermite de la Chaussée d'Antin ou Observations sur les mœurs et les usages parisiens au commencement du XIXe siècle*, vol. 2 (Paris: Pillet, 1815-1816) 310-11.

not throw herself violently on her prey but rather attracts it little by little with a 'coquetterie féroce' until she devours it in her 'embrassements homicides'.[45] As the narrator informs us, her detestable instincts were only developed in Europe, their violence tempered and expression modified. She is a most explicit example of explosive *métissage*: her instinctual vampirism is refined, honed and made even more dangerous through her association with European 'civilisation'.

When Cecily is first introduced, the term '*métisse*' is defined by Sue in a footnote as the Creole product of a white man and a quadroon slave, adding that 'les métisses ne diffèrent des blanches que par quelques signes imperceptibles'.[46] In this assertion lies a contradiction that goes to the heart of mixed-race representation: first, there *are* signs that distinguish racial difference and second, these signs are imperceptible. Apparently the same, the *métisse* is undeniably (if invisibly) different. As Robert Young succinctly asserts,

> Hybridity makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same and the different no longer simply different. In that sense, it operates according to the form of logic that Derrida isolates in the term 'brisure', a breaking and joining at the same time, in the same place: difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity.[47]

We are *told* that she is a Creole/*métisse* but how do we know for sure if, as one of the characters admits, 'il faudrait l'œil impitoyable d'un créole pour découvrir le *sang-mêlé* dans l'imperceptible couleur bistrée qui colore légèrement la couronne des ongles roses de cette métisse; nos fraîches beautés du Nord n'ont pas un teint

[45] Sue, 3: 286-7.
[46] Ibid. 1: 162. Creole is generally defined as a foreign person born in the colonies, thus, it can refer to someone originally of African or European descent. In most definitions, métis refers generally to a mixed-race person, a sang-mêlé. Here, Sue uses it as a specific interracial product. In this way, he seems to echo Moreau de Saint-Méry's racial taxonomies that will be discussed later.
[47] Young, 26.

plus transparent, une peau plus blanche, des cheveux d'un châtain plus doré'?[48] The ruthless Creole eye is needed to uncover the 'imperceptible signs' of mixed blood, to differentiate and categorise legitimate whiteness from deceptive whiteness, for there is no question that the *métisse*, an appellation predicated upon racial hybridity and colour, must be indeed distinct from 'nos fraîches beautés du Nord'. Our narrator possesses just such an eye; he has the ability to penetrate the deceptive white façade of the *métisse* for the benefit of the reader. This is not dissimilar from his ability to pierce the mask of Ferrand. Both characters are made equivalent by the text: they are natural hypocrites, natural voluptuaries and natural criminals. While they may deceive the other characters in the novel, neither Rodolphe nor the narrator has any doubt as to their guilt. While the reader is made privy to the evil machinations of Ferrand, no such overt proof is provided by the narrative to condemn Cecily: only a vague reference to further scandals is made. It would seem that her mixed-blood is proof enough of her guilt; she follows her racial type.

What are these 'imperceptible signs' that identify her type and thus prove her guilt? In a prolonged perusal of Cecily's body, the narrator detects the faint but telltale signs of racial difference: a matte whiteness of skin colour, a bluish tinge around her extraordinarily large black eyes, and a faint half-moon tinge on the fingernails. Neither the reference to fingernails nor to matte complexion as racial signs is an invention of Sue; similarly, while I have not been able to trace the origin of the tinged eye motif, I would also assume that it is not originally Sue's. Rather, he makes use of conventionalised motifs to identify racial difference. Without direct reference to scientific texts to corroborate his claims, he presupposes the existence and measurability of these visible racial markers. If Sue is using an established motif, from whence does it come? Werner Sollors traces the literary motif of the fingernail and its pseudo-scientific underpinnings. He finds observations regarding fingernails as an early indicator of racial difference in the

[48] Sue, 1: 163.

scientific and travel literature of the eighteenth century by authors such as Labat, Le Cat, Moreau de Saint-Méry, and Buffon. [49] Jean-Baptiste Labat, in a chapter on mulattoes, recommends observing a newborn's nails to discover its race, since he believes that all children are born white (or almost white) and develop their colour in eight to ten days after birth.

> Lorsqu'on veut être assuré de quelle couleur doit être l'enfant, il n'y a qu'à le faire découvrir, car s'il est d'un Negre & d'une Negresse, il a les parties naturelles toutes noires; & s'il est d'un blanc & d'une Negresse, ses parties sont blanches ou presque blanches. Si on ne veut pas venir à cette preuve, en voicy [sic] une plus aisée, c'est de regarder à la naissance des ongles, c'est-à-dire, l'endroit où les ongles sortent de la chair, car si on remarque que cet endroit soit noir, c'est une marque infaillible que l'enfant sera noir; mais si cette place est blanche ou presque blanche, on peut dire avec certitude que l'enfant est Mulâtre… [50]

While it appears that the signification of the fingernail as an indicator of race was mentioned in ethnographic studies from the first half of the eighteenth century, its entrance – according to Sollors – as a literary motif can be traced back to Victor Hugo's 1826 *Bug-Jargal.* This historical novel set during the Haitian Revolution relies upon the work of Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry for corroboration of its racial categories, which includes the unfailing sign of racial difference: the fingernail. [51] In *Bug-Jargal*, a mulatto Haitian planter is presented

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[49] Sollors cites Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau Voyage aux Isles de l'Amérique* (Paris: Delespine, 1742); Claude Nicolas Le Cat, *Traité de la couleur de la peau humaine en général, et de celle des nègres en particulier, et de la métamorphose d'une de ces couleurs en l'autre* (Amsterdam, 1765); Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique, et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue* vol. 1; and M. le Comte Buffon, *Histoire naturelle: générale et particulière* vol. 2 (1749; reprint Paris: Hôtel de Thou, 1772), Sollors, 151-157.

[50] Jean-Baptiste Labat, 'Des Mulâtres. Maniere de les connoître. Histoire du *** & de quelques habitans blancs qui épousé des Négresses' in *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l'Amérique* vol. 1 [32-37] (Np. La Haye: 1724) 34-35.

[51] Hugo explains the 'scientific' basis of his racial naming in an early footnote in which he credits Moreau de Saint-Méry's taxonomic system: 'M. Moreau de Saint Méry, en développant le système de Franklin, a classé dans des espèces génériques les différentes teintes que présentent les mélanges de la population de couleur. […] Marchant de cette couleur [noir] vers le blanc, on distingue neuf souches principales, qui ont encore entre elles des variétés d'après le plus ou le moins de parties

as an opportunist parvenu who denies his mixed-race background among the white settlers until he falls into the hands of the black rebels and appeals to them for protection. To convince the black leader of his mixed-blood, he presents his fingernails as a sign: '…la preuve que je suis sang-mêlé, c'est ce cercle noir que vous pouvez voir autour de mes ongles'.[52] Hugo, unsure of his reader's background knowledge of such racial signs, includes a clarifying footnote in which he claims that 'plusieurs sang-mêlés présentent en effet à l'origine des ongles ce signe, qui s'efface avec l'âge, mais renaît chez leurs enfants'.[53]

In his influential topographical, historical and ethnographic study of Saint-Domingue, Moreau de Saint-Méry provides an in-depth examination of racial difference in the colony's population, in which the author asserts that 'il faut des yeux bien experts' to distinguish certain categories of mixed-race from the white race.[54] Doris Garraway observes of Moreau's work:

> The elaborate taxonomy is founded on a belief in the racial purity of the first two factors – black and white – and a confidence that skin color adequately reflects these and the

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qu'elles retiennent de l'une ou de l'autre couleur. […] Le *sang-mêlé*, en continuant son union avec le blanc, finit en quelque sorte par se confondre avec cette couleur. On assure pourtant qu'il conserve toujours sur une certaine partie du corps la trace ineffaçable de son origine.' Victor Hugo, *Bug-Jargal* (London: John Murray, 1908) 2.

[52] Ibid. 72.

[53] Ibid. Sollors finds a variety of American, German and English literary texts from the latter half of the nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century that draw on the fingernail motif in their depiction of interracial couples or mixed race characters, including Theodor Storm's North German 1865 novella 'Von jenseit des Meeres' ('From Across the Sea') in which the architect Alfred describes his encounter with Jenni, a beautiful foreign girl, upon whose 'slender little white fingers' were 'the small half moons at the root of her nails…not as ours are, lighter than the rest of the nails, but darker and bluish. I had not yet read then that this is considered the identifying sign of America's frequently beautiful pariahs in whose veins even a mere drop of slave blood course; but it was a strange sight, and I could not take my eyes off it'. Theodor Storm, 'Von jenseit des Meeres' *Dedichte, Novellen, 1848-1867*, ed. Dieter Lohmeier (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987) 655; cited in Sollors, 143-4. Sollors also mentions Rudyard Kipling's 1887 short story 'Kidnapped', set in India, in which 'Peythroppe is prevented by his friends from marrying the "Spanish" complexioned Miss Castries whose "little opal-tinted onyx at the base of her finger-nails" reveals her racial identity "as plain as print."' Sollors cites Kipling, 'Kidnapped' in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1987) 144; cited in Sollors, 134. See Sollors, 142-161.

[54] Moreau de Saint-Méry, 1: 93.

> degrees of mixture between them. Yet at every turn, the tabulations seem only to suggest the absurdity of dividing humanity by degrees of skin color, for even Moreau cannot quite decide to what extent heredity drives physical appearance. […] A further problem arises when Moreau admits degrees of color within each category, stretching the limits of whiteness beyond the imagination. For each step on the way towards white, the author devises an inventive poetics with which to render the visible (or invisible) trace of race.[55]

Moreau de Saint-Méry's chimerical conception of race imagines and tabulates difference according to ostensibly discernable – and yet highly ambivalent – physical difference. His poetics of race locates and identifies the imperceptible clues of difference that only an expert eye can identify such as: 'une nuance d'un jaune très-affaibli' or 'une blancheur matte, décolorée' that subtly differentiates a 'métisse' or a 'quarteronne', or a 'mamelouc' from a 'white'.[56] The Métis(se) possesses 'une peau fort blanche…mais cette blancheur n'est point animée'.[57] In Sue, we find a similar emphasis on the *métisse*'s dullness of complexion that an experienced eye can identify.

> L'échancrure de son spencer permet de voir son cou élégant et potelé, *d'une blancheur éblouissante, mais sans transparence*…Son teint a la *blancheur mate*, la fraîcheur satinée d'une feuille de camélia imperceptiblement dorée par un rayon de soleil'.[58]

By referring to Cecily's complexion as 'd'une blancheur éblouissante, mais sans transparence', Sue subtly demonstrates that Cecily's is but a mere simulacrum of

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[55] Doris Garraway, 'Race, Reproduction and Family Romance in Moreau de Saint-Méry's *Description…de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue*', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.2 (2005): 227-246; 230.
[56] Moreau de Saint-Méry, 1: 91 and 92.
[57] Ibid. 1: 92.
[58] Sue, 3: 286. My emphasis. Maurice Dubard's *Fleur d'Afrique* has a similar reference in his description of a mulatto woman: 'Elle était adorablement jolie […] elle n'avait aucun des traits caractéristiques de la race noire. Seul, son teint mat, doré par le soleil…' (Paris: Ollendorf, 1894) 105.

whiteness; it is pretence. He also contradicts his own earlier assertion that 'nos fraîches beautés du Nord n'ont pas un teint plus transparent, une peau plus blanche'. These paradoxical observations underscore the disconcerting uncertainty surrounding the identification of the *métisse*. I would suggest that his subsequent avowal of Cecily's matte complexion is meant to signal a subtle sign of difference as well as a sign of natural deceit. What she lacks, as Sue writes, is transparency. Disingenuousness colours her; deceit (lack of transparency) is the focal aspect of her complexion and, indeed, her character. Over twenty years later, Émile Zola will use a strikingly similar image in his portrait of his eponymous *métisse* heroine, Thérèse Raquin. 'On ne voyait pas le corps, qui se perdait dans l'ombre; le profil seul apparaissait, *d'une blancheur matte*, troué d'un œil noir largement ouvert, et comme écrasé sous une épaisse chevelure sombre.[59] Like Sue, Zola will emphasise the disingenuousness inherent in the *métisse* wrapped up in her deceptive whiteness.

Next, Sue describes the slight bluish tinge around Cecily's enormous black eyes.

> Ses yeux, d'une grandeur presque démesurée, ont une expression singulière, car leur prunelle, extrêmement large, noire et brillante, laisse à peine à apercevoir, aux deux coins des paupières frangées de longs cils, *la transparence bleuâtre du globe de l'œil*".[60]

This motif centring upon the 'mezzotinto' eyes of the mulâtresse we find not only in Sue, but also in Loti's *Le Roman d'un spahi*, and in the Irish-American Dion Boucicault's 1859 play, *The Octoroon, or Life in Louisiana*. Loti describes his mulâtresse Cora as 'blanche et pâle […] avec […] de grands yeux cerclés de bleu, qui se fermaient à demi, qui tournaient lentement, avec une langueur créole.'[61] Boucicault's protagonist, Zoë is described as having 'bluish tinge under her nails

[59] Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1975) 17. My emphasis.
[60] Sue, 3: 286. My emphasis.
[61] Loti, 69.

and around her eyes as evidence of her Black' roots. She refers to it as 'the dark fatal mark…the ineffaceable curse of Cain.'[62]

The texts suggest that these are accurate signs of racial difference but they also force the reader into a position of complicity as, like a racial taxonomist, we peruse the body of Cecily, Cora, Thérèse, or Zoë and stop at these specific indicators of her coloured status. We, as reader, are implicated in the process of racial identification: our eyes are guided along the bodies of these women and we are complicit racial detectives searching for clues that identify and categorise them. We read into the reference to matte complexion or tinged eyes a typology that renders these women racially distinct despite their apparent whiteness. Central to the *métisse* is the simultaneous presence and absence of colour. In the face of her inscrutable sameness (whiteness), the author must constantly reaffirm her otherness (colour) by introducing coloured traits that undermine the apparently white façade. Her whiteness/colourlessness lacks transparency and functions as a natural mask that hides the depraved instincts that are attached to the very colour that does not tinge her skin but taints her character.

As we have seen with both Moreau de Saint-Méry and Sue, deceptive whiteness is difficult to ascertain and requires the seasoned, ruthless eye of an expert. With detachment and distance, we are told that a *métisse* can be properly identified, and in the process properly controlled. While Cecily may be the perfect weapon against a particular lubricious man, we are told that she has no power over one who is discerning, sophisticated, and sensible. Rodolphe is unaffected by her particular brand of sexual power because he has no illusions about her: his cool, rational mind cannot be clouded with the brand of unreasonable lust that is Cecily's

[62] Dion Boucicault, *Plays by Dion Boucicault,* ed. Peter Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), cited and discussed in Jennifer Devere Brody's *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 50. See Brody, 46-58 for more discussion of the character of Zoe in Boucicault's play. See also Sollors, 143.

speciality. Indeed, his dominance over her is total: he not only has complete knowledge of who and what she is, but he also controls her body. She displays it to Ferrand at Rodolphe's command, and when she has completed her mission, her body will again be locked up according to Rodolphe's law. The power to know, to see, to display, and to imprison is in the hands of Rodolphe. Cecily's dominion is limited to weaker victims who do not have the mental or moral fortitude to resist. However, the ostensibly naturalist and dispassionate description of Cecily is tempered by the fact that her role in the narrative is to invite the voyeurism of Jacques Ferrand and in the process the reader.

Performing Cecily

Arriving at Ferrand's home ostensibly as the new maid, Cecily drives her employer crazy with a lust that she will not appease. In a chapter entitled, 'Luxurieux point ne seras', the narrator pauses meaningfully over the *mise-en-scène* that Cecily creates in which to perform her sexuality. In the middle of Cecily's carefully-locked bedroom door is cut a small window through which one can peer into her red-tinged room, and which faces her bed. 'C'est donc sur cette tenture grenat, fond vigoureux et chaud de ton, que se dessine la figure de Cecily, que nous allons tacher de peindre.'[63] Already, the narrator signals the artistry attached to Cecily's presentation. She is framed by the window, against a red backdrop that only heightens the dramatic impact of her richly sculptured curves. She presents herself for the lustful delectation of her employer and prey…and the reader; our eyes move from her 'belle épaules' down to her 'larges hanches'.[64] As we look (along with Ferrand) through the window at Cecily, she is not only enclosed in the window frame; the mirror into which she is staring simultaneously frames her. We see Ferrand staring at Cecily, who seems to be staring at her own reflection. This framing *en abyme* highlights the very essence of Cecily, what Mulvey describes as

[63] Ibid, 3: 285.
[64] Ibid. 3: 285.

'to-be-looked-at-ness'.[65] She *is* to be seen, as she tells Ferrand, 'Regardez-moi…ce guichet est fait pour cela…'[66]

Through the orchestration of her own voyeuristic objectification, Cecily paradoxically attains mastery over her voyeur. Voyeurism depends upon the transgression of boundaries to attain the sexual gratification that comes from watching that which is forbidden. Peering through a peephole, the voyeur violates established limits; he sees what he should not see and the pleasure derived from this is intertwined with the fantasy of what one might call a kind of panoptic power. However, this does not happen here. The power of voyeurism, which stems from the invisibility of the voyeur, is undermined by the fact that the object of the gaze here arranges the mechanism for viewing and determines what can be seen. The voyeur in this scene finds himself in a loss of control; his gaze becomes masochistic. In his agony he cries, 'C'est trop souffrir! Oh ! si je ne craignais la mort ! […] Mais mourir c'est renoncer à vous voir, et vous êtes si belle…J'aime encore mieux souffrir…et vous regarder…'[67] The torture of gazing upon Cecily's displayed body is equal to the erotic pleasure gained. Thus, Ferrand exists in a hellish world of agonising exultation. He describes Cecily as 'ce démon que je chéris et que je maudis'.[68] She is both 'reine chérie' and 'démon de volupté'.[69]

We have already examined the extent to which Cecily *is* what the narrator/detective is able to uncover about her. The visually ascertainable clues of racial difference (and their deceptive absence) code Cecily as a *métisse* and bestow upon her all of the character attributes associated with such a name. However, in this scene, tied up with the constitutive power of this taxonomic eye upon the body of Cecily is the equally important element of performance: her status as a *métisse*

[65] Mulvey, 19.
[66] Sue, 3: 296.
[67] Ibid. 3:296.
[68] Ibid. 4:156.
[69] Ibid. 4:157.

makes her naturally deceptive, the perfect actress. In this scene, Cecily is forced to display herself as an erotic spectacle. While we follow Ferrand's eye as he gazes with growing passion at his seductress, we are distanced from him because we possess knowledge that he does not. We are privy to the fact that Cecily is *performing* a deception. The narrator has exposed her falseness to us. Not only do we find a perverse delight in watching the hypocrite Ferrand duped by the duplicitous Cecily, we are simultaneously warned of the power wielded by this 'kind' of woman and her potential danger to the less discerning observer. Thus, inextricably linked to the seduction scene is its falseness. The *guichet* frames Cecily's room as if framing a painting and the text leaves us in no doubt as to the contrived nature of the scene.

> De l'étroit guichet où il se tenait immobile, tel était le tableau qu'apercevait Jacques Ferrand: au milieu de la zone lumineuse formée par les tremblantes clartés du foyer, Cecily, dans une pose pleine de mollesse et d'abandon, à demi couchée sur un vaste divan damas grenat, tenait une guitare dont elle tirait quelques harmonieux préludes. […] Pour compléter l'effet de ce tableau, que le lecteur se rappelle l'aspect mystérieux, presque fantastique, d'un appartement où la flamme de la cheminée lutte contre les grandes ombres noires qui tremblent au plafond et sur les murailles.[70]

There is nothing natural about this episode and our pleasure comes from watching the carefully orchestrated performance of Cecily as she successfully cons the novel's ultimate conman. She has arrived at Ferrand's door dressed in Alsatian costume, which is 'aussi simple que coquet […] d'un goût bizarre, un peu théâtral, et ainsi d'autant plus approprié à l'effet qu'elle a voulu produire'.[71] Thus, from the moment that Cecily is presented to Ferrand, she is playing a role ('faire une frime'[72]). Her costume both masks her identity and shows off her attractive body to full effect. In addition, she invents various stories about her identity and

[70] Ibid. 3: 301.
[71] Ibid. 3: 285.
[72] Ibid. 3: 246.

background. ‘La détestable créature sut donner à son geste et à ses…paroles un accent de vérité si incroyable.’[73] Using her aptitude for *vraisemblance*, Cecily assumes a variety of roles to exasperate and entice Ferrand. While Ferrand recognises the theatrical transformations of Cecily, he is unaware of her true designs. ‘Parmi toutes les hypothèses que cette bizarre aventure souleva dans l’esprit du notaire, le véritable motif de la présence de la créole chez lui ne pouvait venir à sa pensée.’[74] She playfully assumes the role of a Romantic heroine only to dismiss it much to the frustration of Ferrand who continues to ask himself, ‘Quelle était cette femme?’[75] In one of her many stories Cecily claims to be the daughter of a brave soldier.

> ‘J’ai reçu une éducation au-dessus de mon état; j’ai été séduite, puis abandonnée par un jeune homme riche. Alors j’ai fui mon pays natal’ – Puis éclatant de rire, Cecily ajouta : – ‘Voilà j’espère, une petite histoire très-présentable et surtout très-probable, car elle a été souvent racontée. Amusez toujours votre curiosité avec cela, en attendant quelque révélation plus piquante.’[76]

Cecily dons and discards characters; she sardonically undercuts Romantic clichés. She is a consummate performer, we are told by the narrator, as a result of her natural disingenuousness, her lack of transparency. However, I believe that this scene highlights the performative nature of identity – and in particular, race. Here I refer to Judith Butler’s conception of constructed identity, which is drawn from psychoanalytic theory, whereby she sees identity as repeated stylisation of the body that over a period of time produces the appearance of a ‘natural’ substance. Coining the term ‘performative’, Butler argues that identity is a repetition of certain acts, including dress, speech, and gesture, that allow us to be socially

[73] Ibid. 3: 292.
[74] Ibid. 3: 292.
[75] Ibid. 3: 292.
[76] Ibid. 3: 298.

recognisable, which thus stabilises our experience in the world.[77] I would argue that Cecily's imitation of white Romantic heroines or Alsatian maids reveals the imitative structure of race and gender, as well as its contingency.[78] Her playful parody is an articulation of the discursiveness of identity. Her adoption of gestures, speeches, and costumes foregrounds the constructed nature of identity and can be applied to our reading of her throughout the text. Given the paradoxical nature of Cecily's 'colouring' in the narrative – she is (almost) invisibly coloured – and given the narrator's maintenance of Cecily's 'white but not quite' appearance, we can begin to see the appellation of '*métisse*' not as an ontological category but rather as discursive effect. Juxtaposing Homi Bhabha's conception of mimicry and Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity provides us with a way to understand performative reiteration as constitutive to gender and race identity. Both Bhabha and Butler stress a shift away from ontology toward the 'performative' and 'enunciatory present'.[79] Although performativity is not explicitly mentioned in Bhabha's essay, 'Of Mimicry and Man', his articulation of mimicry involves a similar process as the one Butler describes, as the colonised subject must incessantly 'mime and inhabit the colonists' authority and hegemonic ideals'.[80] While Bhabha correctly observes that mimicry, under the cover of camouflage, 'mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them', he underplays the limits of what I show is ultimately a 'superficial' form of power. Within the confines of Sue's narrative, the power that Cecily derives from her ability to perform and pass is, in the end, outweighed by the narrator's essentialism: she is still *known* (according to type) and thus controlled by the

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[77] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). See also Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[78] Sara Salih uses this expression in reference to Butler's conception of drag. In both cases, the performative element of identity is illustrated through the foregrounding of parody. See Salih, 65.

[79] Bhabha, 'The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency' in *The Location of Culture*, 178.

[80] Catherine Rottenberg in 'Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire' in *Criticism* 45.4 (2003): 435-452; 440. While Bhabha's conception proves, I believe, a fruitful supplement to Butler, his discussion of mimicry is not gendered and, therefore, fails to take into account the sexual power games I discuss above. See Bhabha's essay, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' as well as 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism' in *The Location of Culture*, 66-84.

powers that be.[81] However, even if the text denies an explicit rupturing of the authority of the discourses that articulate racial identity, Cecily's parody foregrounds the constructed – and constructible – nature of identity and suggests that the materiality of Cecily's identity can only be understood through a discourse that constitutes her through naming her '*métisse*'. In other words, her racial identity only exists insofar as it must constantly be rearticulated by the narrator who highlights the indicators of racial difference that he simultaneously acknowledges are imperceptible.

Beguiling Cecily goes so far as to perform a song for Ferrand, entitled 'La femme amoureuse' in which she pleads with impatient ardour for her absent lover to come and relieve her.[82] The song, which Cecily refers to as 'très-naïf et très-pastoral' has echoes of Charles Castellan's 1832 poem, 'La Mulâtresse', in which the speaker is similarly equated with her surroundings; she is as savage and natural as the bucolic backdrop in which she is positioned. However, whereas in Castellan's poem, the mulatta speaker is a safe and exciting courtesan, in Cecily's song, there is an underlying threat to the male lover: 'Ceux que j'aime comme je t'aime…je les tue…' In turn the waiting, willing woman and the dangerous *femme fatale*, the speaker in the song underscores the ambivalent balance of power between lovers that is articulated in this scene.

Thus reduced to peering through the small *guichet* in Cecily's locked door, Jacques Ferrand is forced to live an excruciating life of unfulfilled passion, cut off from the

[81] Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man', 91.

[82] The song is printed in full in the text: 'Des fleurs, partout des fleurs… / Mon amant va venir! L'attente du bonheur et me brise et m'énerve. / Adoucissons l'éclat du jour, la volupté cherche une ombre transparente… / Au frais parfum des fleurs mon amant préfère ma chaude haleine… / L'éclat du jour ne blessera pas ses yeux, car ses paupières, sous mes baisers, resteront closes. Mon ange, oh ! viens…mon sein bondit, mon sang brûle… / Viens…viens…viens… / Si mon amant était là et que sa main effleurât mon épaule nue, je me sentirais frissonner et mourir… / S'il était là…et que ses cheveux effleurassent ma joue, ma joue si pâle deviendrait pourpre… / Ma joue si pâle serait en feu… / Ame de mon âme, si tu étais là…mes lèvres avides ne diraient pas une parole… / Vie de ma vie, si tu étais là, ce n'est pas moi qui, expirante…demanderais grâce. / Ceux que j'aime comme je t'aime…je les tue… / Mon ange, oh ! viens…mon sein bondit…mon sang brûle… / Viens…viens…viens…' Ibid. 3:302.

object of his lust but for a small peephole; he is transformed from master to slave.[83] Derisively, Cecily refers to Ferrand as her master but he is quick to point out that he is in fact her scorned slave whose only reason to live is so that he may continue to look upon his beautiful mistress. 'Ma servante! C'est moi qui suis votre esclave…votre esclave moqué, méprisé…'[84] Finally, when she feels that he can stand no more, Cecily makes a deal with him: if he can prove that his passion for her is strong enough that he would sacrifice everything for it, she will open the door so that he may possess her. Ferrand responds that he will place his honour, his fortune, and his life in her hands by revealing to her his many crimes. To that end, he gives her proof of them. Unable to restrain himself any longer, Ferrand breaks down the door separating him from Cecily but he is too late. She has taken the evidence against him and fled out the window into a waiting carriage. Stupefied, Ferrand wanders into the courtyard and stumbles upon an open grave and falls lifeless into it.

We find him several chapters later, a shadow of his former self, under the control of the prince who is armed with the proof that Cecily has collected. His health has deteriorated to such a degree that he resembles a cadaver. Under the threat of the scaffold, Ferrand is forced to pay restitution for his crimes. His reason for wishing to remain alive – now that all of his money is gone – stems not from an instinct for self-preservation, but rather from the masochistic desire to revisit the memory of his beloved Cecily. '"Oui" – reprit-il dans une effrayante exaltation – "je l'aime toujours, et je ne veux pas mourir, afin de pouvoir me plonger et me replonger encore avec un atroce plaisir dans cette fournaise, où je me consume à petit feu… "'[85] He compares her to a demon that he loves more frenetically than ever. Finally, after excruciating physical pain and madness, Ferrand dies of an unspecified illness. However, the monstrous hallucinations that plague him lead us

[83] '…de maître il devint esclave; il fut le valet de Cecily; il la servait à ses repas, il prenait soin de son appartement.' Ibid. 3:280.
[84] Ibid. 3: 297.
[85] Ibid. 4: 134.

to believe that the infernal Cecily is at the heart of his descent into madness and finally his death which we are told is caused by 'une frénésie érotique'.[86] In this way, Cecily orchestrates his punishment and his death.

In a novel peopled with prostitutes, it is interesting that a woman who is not a prostitute by trade is the only one to explicitly articulate her sexuality. The heroine of the novel, Fleur-de-Marie, the long-lost daughter of Rodolphe, is what one critic calls, 'la courtisane vertueuse'.[87] Regardless of Fleur-de-Marie's status as prostitute, she is portrayed as innocent and chaste, a tender spirit whose enormous sense of guilt will eventually result in her tragic death. She possesses a 'front pur, visage d'un type angélique…d'une suavité de lignes raphaélesques…cheveux d'un blond cendré magnifique…taille fine et souple.[88] Her portrait is polished and reassuring: her simple, wholesome goodness is evidenced in her blond beauty.[89] Angelic and pure, she has been forced into her profession by an unforgiving and cruel society. On the other hand, Cecily's sole function in the novel is to elicit lust since her coloured typology makes her a courtesan. Both Fleur-de-Marie and Cecily are sexualised women: one in name only and the other in everything but name. As such, they function relationally. Cecily is the fulfilment of all that Fleur-de-Marie implies but must renounce in order to maintain her status as virtuous heroine. Jennifer Devere Brody notes a similar relationship between the mulatta Rhoda and the white Amelia in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. 'They form the obverse/reverse, since one is "white" and pure and the other is "black" and impure. The black woman serves as a basis of comparison that establishes, and in fact, embellishes the white woman.'[90] Léon-François Hoffmann puts it thus, 'La Vénus

[86] Ibid. 4:154
[87] Georges Jarbinet, *Les Mystères de Paris d'Eugène Sue* (Paris: Société Française d'Éditions Littéraires et Techniques, 1932) 107.
[88] Ibid. 109-110.
[89] See Jennifer Yee's investigation of the *blonde/brune* dichotomy in nineteenth-century French literature. Jennifer Yee, *Clichés de la femme exotique : Un regard sur la littérature coloniale française entre 1871-1914* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000) 108-114; and 278.
[90] Brody, 30. Interestingly, Rhoda Swartz is not black but mulatto. Nevertheless, the novel positions her as the ultimate foil against which the character of ladylike Amelia is articulated.

noire complémente l'Aphrodite blanche. Elle offre à la volupté un interlude piquant et, au dire des connaisseurs, est particulièrement douée pour les jeux de l'amour'.[91]

Cecily, as the novel's 'Vénus noire', not only provides a piquant interlude for the reader, she also demonstrates the dangerous power of her brand of sexuality on a weaker man. In the act of watching Cecily, Ferrand is duped and enslaved. We witness the dangerous power of Cecily's sexuality as she manipulates Ferrand through her skilful self-presentation. Her ability to control the ocular desire of her voyeur allows her to maintain dominion over him. Not only does she invite voyeurism, but also through the use of the *guichet* she controls what can be seen of her. Her performance is ultimately lethal. In this way, Cecily functions as a warning to her reader/voyeur. She must be watched with caution and detachment if she is to be managed. The ruthless eye of the narrator and the detached, rational mind of Rodolphe are immune to her brand of unreasonable lust that preys on the weak or depraved like Jacques Ferrand. She must not be allowed to represent herself, for in this way she is capable of eliciting dangerous (homicidal) desire. However, this conception of Cecily as the agent of her own performance is misleading. Certainly, at the narrative level, Cecily performs according to the model set forth by the narrator. She is a master of deception and seduction. She exhibits herself with every intention of inflaming, manipulating, and duping. However, even at the level of narrative, her power is severely curtailed. Her body is Rodolphe's instrument of revenge: while she can choose *how* to portray herself sexually, there is no question that she *must* perform. She is coerced into being the creator of her own objectification. If there is any power to be found here, it is only of the most superficial kind. At the formal level, the 'oeil impitoyable' of the narrator, locates upon Cecily's body the (barely) visible referents of colour that both prove and undermine her difference.

[91] Hoffmann, 216. This complementarity of black and white embodiments of love will be discussed in chapter four with reference to Baudelaire and his 'muses'.

In Pierre Loti's novel, we find a similarly *visible métisse* character whose ability to perform a seduction and to perform a 'white but not quite' identity seems to echo Sue. However, in Loti's colonial landscape where racial truth is known to all but the most naïve, his *métisse*, Cora, cannot maintain the ambiguity and performative ability found in Cecily. Cora's role is not so much to perform as to be *unmasked*. Whereas on the formal level, Sue's narrator possesses the 'ruthless eye of the Creole' it is in Loti that racial exposure is 'narrativised'.

Cora's Corruption

Pierre Loti's *Le Roman d'un spahi* is a tragic story of racial transgression. Jean Peyral, the pure and innocent hero, is corrupted in degrees by the exotic milieu of Africa and the coloured women to whom he is fatally attracted. The first of the stages of moral decline to which Jean succumbs takes the form of an affair with the beautiful and treacherous Cora. Jean's naïve attachment to her marks the beginning of Loti's exposition of the tragic implications of the colonial enterprise in which, as one critic writes, 'l'ailleurs édénique se fait lieu de perdition ou de mort'.[92] Indeed, the novel crystallises the myth – as Quella-Villéger suggests – of an 'Afrique tragique', which will serve as a reference for subsequent generations.

> Ce qui caractérise la vision de Loti, c'est le retournement progressif qu'il fait subir au mythe du bon sauvage, le paradis innocent traité de façon primesautière devenant lieu du mal, lieu de mort. […] [Loti] joue sur les cordes d'une sentimentalité naive, parfois paternaliste, afin de raconter l'étranger, le dominé.[93]

Jean Peyral succumbs not only to the seductive powers of Cora, a *métisse*, and Fatou-gaye, a young African girl; he simultaneously falls victim to implacable,

[92] Alain Quella-Villéger, *Pierre Loti l'incompris* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1986) 56.
[93] Ibid.

overpowering, savage, and unhealthy Africa, where he will meet his death during a colonial military expedition. While there may not be a causal link between Jean's interracial affairs and his untimely death, these multiple subplots are all rooted in a conception of the colonial enterprise as one of dangerous contagion and tragic loss. Paul Vigné d'Octon, a medical doctor and novelist, and a contemporary of Loti, writes in the preface of his *Martyrs lointains*, which was published eleven years after *Le Roman d'un spahi*:

> …Lorsque la Vénus noire vous étreint et que la Malaria, cette sombre fée des marigots, vous mord les reins, qu'elle vous glace après que l'autre vous brûle, il n'y a qu'un moyen de leur échapper, c'est de monter sur un bateau qui met le cap sur la France. Il faut partir ! Et encore, une fois rentré au pays, faut-il des années et des années pour que la brise salubre de la montagne natale efface les cauchemars des voluptés monstrueuses et pour que, rajeuni, vivifié, le sang coule rouge et pur dans les veines.[94]

Here Vigné d'Octon articulates explicitly the ethos we find in Loti's novel. Jean Peyral is 'infected' by the Africa he encounters, which is embodied in the two 'coloured' women with whom he embarks on ill-fated affairs. His affair with Cora is the fateful 'first step' on Jean's path toward corruption and death.[95]

The plot of the novel turns on the protagonist's internal conflict as he is successively attracted and repulsed by Africa, in turn homesick for his mother and French fiancée, and captivated by his African mistress, Fatou-gaye. The universe of Loti is Manichean, composed of the opposing elements of good and evil, white and black, purity and impurity, reason and irrationality, beauty and ugliness. There

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[94] Paul Vigné d'Octon, *Martyrs lointains* (Paris: Flammarion, 1891) vi-ix. Yee points out that the common *fin-de-siècle* motif of the *femme fatale* appears in the colonial novel in the form of either black magic or contagious illness, like malaria or yellow fever. The motif of vampirism is now linked to the spread of fever and death. Yee, 184-86. See 'Malaria and the Femme Fatale: Sex and Death in French Colonial Africa' in *Literature and Medicine*, 21.2 (2002): 201-215.

[95] Both Quella-Villéger and Lesley Blanch, a Loti biographer, claim that Cora is the only vicious and adulterous character in Loti's gallery of women. Blanch, *Pierre Loti: Portrait of an Escapist* (London: Collins, 1983) 89.

is little room for hybridity or nuance in this simple and clearly demarcated world. Jean, the *spahi*, is a noble white savage whose French roots are solid if rustic. From the Cévennes, Jean represents all that is good and wholesome about the home country and the white race. '…Il était de pure race blanche […] Ce spahi était extrêmement beau, d'une beauté mâle et grave, avec de grands yeux clairs…[et] son large front pur […] Il était d'ordinaire sérieux et pensif; mais son sourire avait une grâce féline et découvrait des dents d'une rare blancheur.'[96] In this introductory descriptive passage of the protagonist, we witness the weaving together of masculinity, beauty, purity, and whiteness in order to create a character 'taillé pour jouer les grands rôles d'amoureux de mélodrames'.[97] In comparison to Jean are the gorilla-faced Africans whose bestiality is constantly referenced in the text.[98] Despite his apparent fascination with his African mistress, Jean is never free from the certitude that he is committing a grave error. 'Il lui semblait qu'il allait franchir un seuil fatal, signer avec cette race noire une sorte de pacte funeste…'[99] The narrative supports Jean's natural repulsion for all things African; when this repulsion diminishes, the text becomes tragic. 'Quelque fois sa grande fierté se réveillait, sa dignité d'*homme blanc* se révoltait. La foi promise à sa fiancée, et trahie pour une petite fille noire, se dressait aussi devant sa conscience honnête; il avait honte d'être si faible.'[100]

The narrative begins with a jaded protagonist who has spent three years in Senegal and in the arms of Fatou-gaye, an African girl whose childish thieving and precocious sensuality exasperate and entice the weary Jean Peyral. The bulk of the ensuing narrative explains how Jean has reached this dismal state of affairs. 'Il avait passé par plusieurs phases morales; – les milieux, le climat, la nature avaient exercé peu à peu sur sa tête jeune toutes les influences énervantes; – lentement, il

[96] Loti, 49.
[97] Ibid. 50.
[98] Ibid. 46
[99] Ibid. 112.
[100] Ibid. 155.

s'était senti glisser sur des pentes inconnues; – et aujourd'hui, il était l'amant de Fatou-gaye, jeune fille noire…'[101] The first of these 'pentes' is the enticing Cora who pursues the hapless newcomer Jean.

> Une femme surtout regardait Jean, une femme qui était plus élégante que les autres et plus jolie. / C'était une mulâtresse, disait-on, mais si blanche, si blanche, qu'on eût dit une Parisienne. / Blanche et pâle, d'une pâleur espagnole, avec des cheveux d'un blond roux, – le blond des mulâtres, – et de grands yeux cerclés de bleu, qui se fermaient à demi, qui tournaient lentement, avec une langueur créole. / C'était la femme d'un riche traitant du fleuve. Mais, à Saint-Louis, on la désignait par son prénom, comme une fille de couleur, on l'appelait dédaigneusement Cora.[102]

In our first encounter with the character of Cora, the narrator establishes that she is socially recognised according to her ascertainable racial identity and named accordingly. In *Le Roman* the repeated use of 'on' implies a more generalised social eye upon Cora that can see past her (European) pallor to the *fille de couleur* that she is. It would seem that the discriminating eye that only a few particularly discerning people possess in Sue's *roman feuilleton* is now widened across the whole of colonial society in Loti's novel. 'C'était une mulâtresse, *disait-on*, mais si blanche, si blanche *qu'on eût dit* une Parisienne.' This phrase implies not only a common social consensus regarding Cora's appearance and the 'truth' that belies it, but also her essential 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. 'Elle revenait de Paris, les autres femmes *pouvaient le voir* à ses toilettes.'[103] When Cora disappears from the city and the novel, we are told that '*on ne la vit plus*, à Saint-Louis, promener ses longues traînes sur le sable'.[104] Cora is seen, known and named by her society.

> Mulâtresse de Bourbon, elle avait été élevée dans l'oisiveté sensuelle et le luxe des créoles riches, mais tenue à l'écart

[101] Ibid. 59.
[102] Ibid. 69.
[103] Ibid. 69-70. My emphasis.
[104] Ibid. 95. My emphasis.

> par les femmes blanches, avec un impitoyable dédain, repoussée partout comme *fille de couleur*. Le même préjugé de race l'avait suivie à Saint-Louis, bien qu'elle fût la femme d'un des plus considérables traitants du fleuve; on la laissait de côté, comme une créature de rebut.[105]

This social identification of Cora is structurally similar to Rodolphe's shrewd recognition of Cecily and the effect comparable: both women are isolated by those who can identify their faint racial signs and understand their true and dangerous nature; Cecily is imprisoned and Cora is ostracised. The difference, however, is significant. Whereas Cecily is 'known' only to a few people, Cora is 'known' to everyone *but* the novel's protagonist. In Loti's colonial world, the *métisse* is a social fact and a tangible fear. The race prejudice that follows Cora from Bourbon to Saint-Louis is revealed in the narrative as an accurate character assessment. Cora is a heartless voluptuary for whom one lover is simply not enough. Jean will discover that Cora has taken on another lover. Her reason is, she says to her other lover who also named Jean, '…j'en voulais deux. – Je vous ai choisi parce que vous vous appelez Jean comme lui ; – sans cela, j'aurais été capable de me tromper de nom en lui parlant: je suis très distraite'.[106]

The phonic similarity between the two *Jeans* and *gens* could serve to show implicitly the indiscriminate nature of Cora's sexual rapacity: she is not simply interested in these two specific *spahis* but rather more generally in *gens*, further underscoring the text's association of *métissage* with prostitution. When Jean first arrives in Senegal, he confronts the institution of 'l'ignoble prostitution mulâtre…[où] il se passait…d'extravagantes bacchanales, enfiévrées par l'absinthe et par le climat d'Afrique'.[107] The link between racial mixture and prostitution is concretised in Loti's depiction in a way that exemplifies the ethos of the colonial novel. As Jennifer Yee claims, woman, and the *métisse* in particular, represents the

[105] Ibid. 71.
[106] Ibid. 77.
[107] Ibid. 68.

aptitude of the Other to be colonised. Her sexual availability incarnates metonymically the availability of the whole race to be conquered.[108] 'Rien d'étonnant, alors, que la métisse soit une prostituée: d'une certaine manière elle partage déjà avec cette dernière son identité d'intermédiaire; elle est une figure du passage entre deux sphères d'influence.'[109] Hazel Carby similarly sees the mulatta 'historically, in terms of narrative plot… [as] a device of mediation. [She] allowed for movement between two worlds, white and black…'[110] Cora functions as the intermediary step on Jean's way toward his tragic affair with Fatou-gaye.[111] Likewise, in Paul Vigné d'Octon's *Chair noire*, published in 1889, the protagonist, Frantz comes to Senegal after assignment in the Antilles where he had an affair with 'une impétueuse mulâtresse au sang de feu, aux âpres désirs sans cesse éveillés'.[112] After his sensual awakening with the mulâtresse, Frantz, like Jean, is embroiled in an unwholesome relationship with a young African girl, Aïssata-lo before he tragically dies. In both novels, the first step toward ultimate corruption and death is the fiery mulâtresse. In a system of colonial sexual exploitation, the *métisse* is both the means for and the result of miscegenation, and as such, she can only be seen sexually. In these two colonial novels, she acts as conduit linking white men and black women; she simultaneously attracts the protagonist with her overt sexuality and embodies his potential *métisse* offspring. Cora – while not a prostitute *per se* – seems to fulfil just this role in her sexually voracious collection of lovers. 'Elle l'aimait en effet, à sa manière de mulâtresse' which means that, 'le

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[108] Yee, 311. This will be discussed at length in chapter three, with specific reference to the paradoxical power inversion implicit within the structure of (white, male) conqueror and (coloured, female) conquered.

[109] Ibid. 305.

[110] Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 89-90.

[111] This unfortunate union produces a doomed son who is strangled to death by his mother, Fatou-gaye upon finding Jean dead on the battlefield. Given Loti's Manichean universe, it is not surprising that the offspring of the ill-fated union must die and that hybridity must be erased through his death. See Yee for more on the theme of male mulatto children in French colonial literature. Yee, 302.

[112] Paul Vigné d'Octon, *Chair noire* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1889), 47. Vigné d'Octon, a medical doctor with the French colonial army, is more explicit than Loti in his condemnation of miscegenation, as he states in the preface of his novel. 'Entre un être de race blanche et un être de race noire…l'amour au sens psychologique du mot ne peut exister…En cette inexplicable attirance qu'exerce la chair noire sur l'Européen démoralisé, seuls les sens du mâle sont en jeu…' xv-xvi.

cœur avait peu de part dans cet amour-là'.[113] We are told that Cora loves both Jeans because they fulfil her two needs. 'Traitée comme une divinité par le spahi, cela la changeait d'être traitée par l'autre comme ce qu'elle était, comme une fille.'[114]

While Jean avoids with horror the African brothels referred to euphemistically in the text as 'ces lieux de plaisir', he cannot resist Cora's powerfully enticing performance.[115] 'Par un raffinement de créature blasée sur le plaisir, elle avait désiré posséder l'âme de Jean en même temps que son corps; avec une chatterie de créole, *elle avait joué, pour cet amant plus jeune qu'elle, une irrésistible comédie d'ingénuité et d'amour*. Elle avait réussi: il lui appartenait bien tout entier.'[116] Like Sue, Loti uses the motif of performance to represent the means by which the *métisse* gains power over her white male victim. Like Ferrand, Jean is intoxicated by his seductress. 'Pauvre Jean, les deux mois qui suivirent s'envolèrent pour lui au milieu de rêves enchantés. Ce luxe inconnu, cette femme élégante, parfumée, tout cela troublait étrangement sa tête ardente et son corps vierge. L'amour dont on ne lui avait montré jusque-là qu'une parodie cynique, maintenant l'enivrait…'[117] Cora's sojourn in Paris has equipped her with a perverse sophistication that attracts Jean. 'A Paris, elle avait eu nombre d'amants très raffinés: sa fortune lui avait permis de faire en France une figure convenable, de goûter au vice élégant et comme il faut. / À présent, elle avait assez des fines mains gantées, des airs étiolés des dandys, des mines romanesques et fatiguées.'[118] We are reminded here of Sue's assertion that Cecily's real danger lies in her ability to hide her instinctual vampire nature behind a 'civilised' European exterior. Not only do these women possess white blood, which accounts for their uncommon beauty, but they also have lived in Europe where their brand of refined corruption has been honed to

[113] Loti, 70 and 71.
[114] Ibid. 95.
[115] Ibid. 68.
[116] Ibid. 73. My emphasis.
[117] Ibid. 70.
[118] Ibid. 71-2.

perfection. The superimposition of refined white upon lascivious black that makes the *métisse* the perfect mistress, according to Hoffmann, is further enhanced in both texts through this geographical exchange.

If Jean has brief moments of doubt or repugnance, these are quickly swept aside by Cora's alluring power. 'Cette pensée l'inquiétait pourtant; cet aveu de cette femme, cette impudeur le révoltaient un peu quand il y songeait. / Mais il y songeait rarement, et, auprès d'elle, il était tout grisé d'amour.'[119] Cecily attracts Ferrand by appealing to his already corrupt and lustful nature while Cora overpowers the chaste Jean who is ill-prepared for her sensual assault. Whereas we find perverse delight in the duping of Ferrand, Jean's enchantment is tinged with calamity particularly because of the fleeting moments of clarity in which Jean's innate racial repulsion breaks the surface of his sensual inebriation. It is this instinctive repugnance that fundamentally separates Jean from Ferrand and makes him a tragic hero of Gobinist proportions who struggles with a powerful attraction toward that which he instinctually feels is wrong and unwholesome.[120] His intuition causes him to doubt his mistress's fidelity and he decides to hide on the balcony of her bedroom and spy on her.

The following scene closes the door that Sue opens: where Cecily's hybridity fertilises various shifting and conflicting identities, all of which accentuate her role as a consummate and natural performer and all of which serve to paralyse Ferrand in the grip of an uncontrollable desire, Cora's hybridity is dismantled, her white mask is whipped off to reveal the black animal beneath to the spying eye of Jean. An eye that now is more interested in 'truth' than erotic spectacle exposes the *métisse* performer. Jean watches Cora as she speaks to her other lover in what seems another language and with a wholly different arsenal of expressions that obliquely suggest her courtesan nature. 'Cora aussi n'était plus la même, son

[119] Loti, 70-1.
[120] See chapter three.

expression avait changé; une espèce de sourire passait sur ses lèvres, – un sourire comme il se rappelait en avoir vue à une grande fille dans un mauvais lieu.'[121] Peering into the bedroom window, Jean watches Cora's seduction performance from a new angle – not as an implicated participant but as a more distant observer. Finally, he can see her for what she is. 'Elle avait changé encore de ton et de visage; avec toutes les câlineries traînantes, grasseyantes de l'accent créole, elle lui dit tout bas des mots d'enfant, et lui tendit ses lèvres, encore chaudes des baisers du spahi.'[122] All of a sudden, the other spahi notices Jean at the window and motions to Cora. 'Brusquement, Cora s'était avancée vers lui, – avec une expression hideuse de bête qu'on a dérangée dans ses amours; – cette femme lui faisait peur…Elle était presque à le toucher…Elle ferma sa porte avec un geste de rage, poussa un verrou derrière, – et tout fut dit.'[123] While we may be *told* of Cecily's homicidal beauty and of her infamy, Sue's narrative withholds the very exposure that Loti describes:

> La mulâtresse, petite-fille d'esclave, venait de reparaître là avec son cynisme atroce, sous la femme élégante aux manières douces; elle n'avait eu ni remords, ni peur, ni pitié… / La femme de couleur et son amant entendirent comme le bruit d'un corps s'affaissant lourdement sur la terre, un grand bruit sinistre dans ce silence de la nuit…[124]

She is now referred to only in terms of colour; her name disappears just as her bestiality is exposed. *Mulâtresse, petite-fille d'esclave,* and *femme de couleur*, all three typological terms refer back to the racial difference of which Jean seems to have been unaware until now. Her beauty disappears and is replaced by a frightening ugliness; her sophisticated manner – cultivated in Europe – is ripped off to reveal an animal in heat that has been interrupted from its sexual recreation. Where Jean once felt love, he feels only terror. Yee perceptively suggests that in

[121] Ibid. 76.
[122] Ibid. 77.
[123] Ibid. 77.
[124] Ibid. 77-8.

the colonial novel the exotic mistress oscillates between identity and alterity depending on her narrative function: when the hero loves her she is exceptionally attractive and approximates a white aesthetic, and when she betrays him, she returns to type, that is, primitive and treacherous.[125] Blackness is what remains when the (white) conventions of culture and civilisation are stripped off. In this way, blackness functions as essentially natural, as a form of 'truth telling'.[126] And the truth of Cora is a frightening, lustful animal. In both the cases of Cora and Cecily, whiteness is deception, blackness – or signs of mixed race – truth. Hugo's mulatto character holds up his hand to 'prove' his rightful racial allegiance. Sue and Loti reveal the falseness of their white-looking *métisse* characters through a reliance on this and other signs. However, whereas Sue uses the conception of hybridity to show its potential for parody and play, albeit within a taxonomic narrative that severely limits its power, Loti ends by denying the possibility of hybridity in favour of white-black binarism. Racial truth must be exposed at the level of narrative in Loti's colonial novel while in Sue's novel it is racial dishonesty that is intrinsic to plot development.

Just as in Sue's novel, once the seduction interlude is complete, Cora is removed from the text. We are told that her sudden departure from Saint-Louis is expedited by her husband on the advice of the local authorities. Evidently, news of the incident had spread around town and 'à Saint-Louis, on s'était ému du dernier scandale de cette femme'.[127]

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[125] See Yee, 95-105; and see Chris Bongie's *Exotic Memories* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991).
[126] Adam Lively, *Masks: Blackness, Race, and the Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998) 55. Lively writes that 'the most insistent leitmotif running through white representations of blackness since the eighteenth century is the idea that black people are in some way closer to nature than whites. Our glimpse at Cora's bestial nature beneath the façade of white respectability articulates just that.
[127] Ibid. 96.

Conclusion

In both novels, the trope of vision is essential to the narrative function of the *métisse* character. Both Cecily and Cora are portrayed as courtesans due to their innate ability to perform (seductions) and due to their essentially sexual nature, both of which are premised upon colour. Furthermore, in Loti's colonial narrative, there seems to be a structural link between prostitution and *métissage*, the *métisse* functioning as an intermediary between two worlds and as a symbol of the availability of the black race to white (sexual) conquest. Both Cecily and Cora's colour requires the perceptive eye of an expert. While in mid-century Paris, there seem to be few such racial specialists, by the end of the century in colonial Senegal, these experts abound. This effect of such a widened social gaze in *Le Roman d'un spahi* is the excision of hybridity through the unmasking of Cora. Despite this important development over the course of the century, what is remarkable in the comparison of the novels is the extent of similarity between these secondary characters. 'White but not quite', courtesans-in-all-but-name, lethal and/or corruptive seducers of male victims, Cecily and Cora function like stock characters in their respective novels. The narrative gaze over the sexualised *métisse* stock character prompts both erotic voyeurism and naturalist observation. Titillation and taxonomy merge as our eye peruses the displayed body of the *métisse*. When their seductive/corruptive work is done, they are removed from sight and returned to isolation or social ostracism.

The unequal power relationship between coloured female and white male lover, the detrimental and potentially lethal effect of the *métisse* upon her lover, the paradoxical attraction toward a woman whose seductive arsenal will inevitably corrupt or kill, these themes found in both Sue and Loti's novels are theorised in Arthur Gobineau's infamous *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* in which he discusses the reasons for and effect of *métissage* in human history. In the next chapter, we move toward an examination of Gobineau's overarching theory of

human civilisation premised upon tragic racial mixture. The *métisse*, as the most desirable product of ultimately catastrophic human interaction, articulates the fundamental paradox at the heart of Gobineau's vision of *métissage*, which he sees as both necessary for human civilisation and the catalyst for its inevitable destruction. His intermeshing of class, race, and gender to create his hierarchy for humanity and his use of contemporary degeneration theories work toward his particular fashioning of the *métisse* whose structural ambiguity resonates in all of the texts we examine.

Chapter Three

Paradoxical *Métissage*: *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*

This chapter will study Arthur Gobineau's paradoxical conception of *métissage* as the motor for civilisation-building as well as the mechanism that will inevitably destroy civilisations. Central to Gobineau's model of human history and human interaction is the natural inequality between the races that results in intrinsic power inequality as races are attracted to and repulsed from one another, as they dominate and submit to one another. To articulate this natural inequality, Gobineau makes metaphoric links between class, race, and gender such that the white, aristocratic male becomes the tragic hero of history: impelled to the noble conquest and domination of other inferior races, he will inevitably suffer the consequence of dilution and debasement of racial purity until he is no better than those he has conquered. Interracial sex becomes the location of violence and reluctant allure, dominion and capitulation. However, as we will see, power inequality is not static and the relational power of the white male over the coloured female is undermined by the very nature of interracial sex as Gobineau conceives it. Desired and decadent, the *métisse* personifies Gobineau's ambivalent vision of *métissage*, in which she is both product and partner. Gobineau's declaration of her undeniable beauty underscores her paradoxical place in what is ostensibly an ethnocentric racial hierarchy that lauds white racial purity as the moral and aesthetic ideal.

The thesis of Arthur Gobineau's 1854 *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* is simply this: in a far distant past, there existed pure and intrinsically unequal races, but through multiple blood mixture (see miscegenation) over the centuries, humanity has been made uniform to the detriment of the more noble, white race.[128] As Jean Gaulmier succinctly summarises: 'Le mélange des sangs a ravalé les

[128] Arthur Gobineau, *Essai sur l'égalité des races humaines*, 4th ed, 2 vol. (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, Imprimeurs-Éditeurs, 1854).

meilleures au niveau des pires, les plus fortes à celui des plus faibles, les plus intelligents au niveau des plus stupides'.[129] Gobineau sees the tawdry democracies of his era as proof of the increasing decadence of humanity in which all former racial nobility has been diluted to homogeneous mediocrity.[130] To articulate his conception of degeneration, Gobineau likens the nation to the human body. The nation or civilisation can be masculine or feminine; it is born, it grows, it dies; it has roots and it can be transplanted. [131] The widespread use of these organic metaphors establishes sexuality – and foundationally miscegenation – as the basis of human interaction and degeneration. In particular, Gobineau's emphasis on blood as the key indicator of human differentiation and thus, the primary element affected by 'mixture', proves to be a powerful discursive tool to 'pathologise' sexuality. [132] Since, in Gobineau's apocalyptic model of human history, the reason for man's degeneration is his blood, there is no possibility of recuperation. 'Il n'y a pas à détourner le mal, il est inévitable. La sagesse ne peut que prévoir, et rien davantage. La prudence la plus consommée n'est pas capable de contrarier un seul instant les lois immuables du monde.'[133] However, the very process by which humanity degenerates, is also the one by which civilisations are created and humanity is (briefly) enriched and revitalised: '…les mélanges sont, dans une certaine limite, favorables à la masse de l'humanité, la relèvent et l'ennoblissent…'[134]

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[129] Jean Gaulmier, *Spectre de Gobineau* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965) 54.
[130] Gobineau notes in a foreword for the second edition of his *Essai* that his theory of race 'est une conséquence naturelle de mon horreur et de mon dégoût pour la démocratie'; cited in Gaulmier, 54.
[131] Often Gobineau uses 'nation' and 'civilisation' interchangeably. Tzvetan Todorov notes that Gobineau's definition of 'civilisation' is anti-Enlightenment and takes force rather than scientific, technical or artistic progress to be a sign of its success. *Nous et les autres: la reflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989) 156.
[132] J.M. Coetzee writes, 'Though we are nominally dealing with a defilement of blood, a genetic defilement, the phenomenon of defilement is so strongly sexualized that the line between blood and sexual fluids is easily blurred,' *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 149.
[133] Gobineau, 1: 102.
[134] Ibid. 1: 219.

Civilisation-building means, for Gobineau, a fusion of blood between the populations of formerly isolated *tribus*; and this drive to build civilisations is considered a sign of superiority. Moreover, Gobineau argues that the characteristic to determine the various levels of human evolution is the way in which a people interacts with others: ignorance of and repulsion from others demonstrates a less evolved state; interaction with others a more highly evolved one. By interaction, Gobineau refers to the impulse to mix, which seems to be based upon domination and submission.

> Mais certaines autres [races], de beaucoup plus imaginatives et plus énergiques, comprennent quelque chose de mieux que le simple maraudage; elles font la conquête d'une vaste terre, et prennent en propriété, non plus les habitants seulement, mais le sol avec eux.[135]

This imaginative, energetic, and intelligent race is white, for only it possesses the spirit of conquest necessary to form civilisations – the impelling *notion civilisatrice* that is predicated upon the crossing of blood between the dominant and the subjugated races. According to Gobineau, history is a product of the activities of the white race, which is responsible for all the major civilisations in the world. 'Elle nous montre que toute civilisation découle de la race blanche, qu'aucune ne peut exister sans le concours de cette race.'[136] The conquering race becomes a kind of benevolent force in Gobineau's model. He imagines the conqueror as one who dominates, governs, and civilises at the same time. Wielding his powers justly, he improves upon the provinces that he controls. Comporting himself according to scripture, the conqueror becomes 'grand devant les hommes'.[137] Tzvetan Todorov appropriately asks the question, 'Mais cette manière de pousser les autres vers le néant, de les faire refluer plus loin, de s'abattre sur eux ou de frapper à leur porte, est-ce autre chose que la conquête militaire, l'expansion

[135] Ibid. 1: 27.
[136] Ibid. 1: 220.
[137] Ibid. 1: 29.

impérialiste des Européens?'[138] (Indeed, two historical figures that Gobineau mentions as supreme examples of this white civilising spirit are Charlemagne and Napoleon.) Not only does a conquering people take over the territory of the defeated, it also assumes some degree of possession over the bodies of the indigenous people.[139] Conquest, then, is political, territorial, and physical. Sexual contact between the two distinct populations merges them into a single whole and in this way a nation is formed.

Miscegenation functions in the essay as the primary explanation for the rise and unavoidable fall of civilisation. While it is crucial for the purpose of nation and civilisation building, it also necessarily prompts the degeneration of the nobler, racially superior blood as it is diluted by weaker, baser blood. Mixtures, in the long run, come at the expense of the nation that is created from them and briefly enriched by them.

> …On voudrait admettre que mieux vaut transformer en hommes médiocres des myriades d'êtres infimes que de conserver des races de princes dont le sang, subdivisé, appauvri, frelaté, devient l'élément déshonoré d'une semblable métamorphose, il resterait encore ce malheur que les mélanges ne s'arrêtent pas; que les hommes médiocres, tout à l'heure formés aux dépens de ce qui était grand, s'unissent à des nouvelles médiocrités, et que de ces mariages, de plus en plus avilis, naît une confusion qui, pareille à celle de Babel, aboutit à la plus complète impuissance, et mène les sociétés au néant auquel rien ne peut remédier. [140]

Purity and pedigree are the ideals in Gobineau's world; however both are a distant memory in our increasingly deteriorating world. How are these terms understood and how are they subsequently maintained? A distinct and pure race can only exist if it is contrasted with the possibility of impure and indistinct races. While Gobineau acknowledges the ahistorical nature of his past, pure races, they function

[138] Todorov, 158.
[139] Gobineau at times uses people and race interchangeably.
[140] Ibid. 1: 219-220.

as the necessary counterpoint by which to judge the extent to which humanity has fallen from grace. Through the assertion of the importance of racial purity, Gobineau acknowledges the threat and presence of impurity – premised upon the reality of interracial sex – if only as the antithesis against which that purity can be defined. Once a racial type is established – be it black, yellow, or white – boundaries are drawn around it so as to cement its definitive and unchanging categories of difference. Then, it is simply a matter of guarding those racial frontiers from the threat of sexual transgression. However, Gobineau concedes that sexual transgression has always been a part of human history. Moreover, he grants that even as he speaks of the white race in his essay as a fixed and stable entity, it is a hybrid. 'C'est vainement qu'on chercherait aujourd'hui à les [modifications spéciales] constater dans l'agglomération métisse qui constitue ce qu'on nomme la race blanche.'[141] The more evolved white race is considered by Gobineau to be more mixed than the black race, which retains its purity…and thus its primitiveness. Here we stumble across one of the paradoxes built into the essay's argument: even while white purity is the ideal the loss of which Gobineau bemoans, the very hybridity of the white race demonstrates its racial supremacy because it alone possesses the civilising ambition to conquer foreign territories and bodies. Miscegenation makes racial purity impossible. Hybridity is the reality and homogenisation the future. Embedded within Gobineau's rigid racial typology is the deconstructive conception of miscegenation, which constantly undermines his foundational premise of racial purity. Moreover, the relationship of purity and impurity, as mutually constitutive – and apparently oppositional – concepts, underscores the paradoxical principle of Gobineau's pessimism – that the sign of racial superiority, evident in the race's desire for intermixture, is tragically the key to that race's decline.

[141] Ibid. 1: 151.

Attraction-Repulsion

For Gobineau, the engine behind race relations is a set of two contradictory physical laws of natural attraction and repulsion between different races. According to him, all humans are subject to these laws that propel them toward and repel them from interracial sex. However, each race reacts in differing degrees to these opposing forces. Those upon whom the repelling force works more strongly are doomed to a more stagnant existence, while those for whom the attracting force is more powerful are the creators of civilisations and empires.

> Ainsi le genre humain se trouve soumis à deux lois, l'une de répulsion, l'autre d'attraction, agissant, à différents degrés, sur ses races diverses; deux lois, dont la première n'est respectée que par celles de ces races qui ne doivent jamais s'élever au-dessus des perfectionnements tout à fait élémentaires de la vie de tribu, tandis que la seconde, au contraire, règne avec d'autant plus d'empire, que les familles ethniques sur lesquelles elle s'exerce sont plus susceptibles de développements. [142]

Primitive peoples are more pureblooded because they cannot overcome their natural repugnance to the crossing of blood. A more dominant race intent on mixture is needed to overcome any reluctance on the part of the more primitive partner. However, this dominant race is not without conflicting drives: while its attraction might outweigh that of a primitive race, it, nonetheless, must overcome its own repulsion, which intermingles with desire. 'Chez plusieurs de ces rameaux, cette répulsion est invincible; chez d'autres, elle n'est domptée que dans une certaine mesure.'[143] Interracial sex, then, is fraught with violence, conflict, repugnance, and unwilling attraction. It is the site upon which are acted out unequal power relations.

[142] Ibid. 1: 29.
[143] Ibid. 1:28.

Not only does the civilising race have to overcome its own natural repulsion toward miscegenation, it must overcome the more primitive racial partner who does not favour sexual congress outside of its racial borders. It could be argued therefore, that for Gobineau, civilisation is based upon the (metaphorical?) rape of an unwilling, racially different partner by a racially superior conqueror. 'In the relation of hierarchical power, the white male's response to the allure of exotic black sexuality is identified with mastery and domination, no doubt fuelled by the resistance of the black female.'[144] Interracial sex is thus linked to conquest and dominion, as well as to the submission of a reluctant non-white partner. However, it is not that straightforward. While the sexual conqueror may succeed in forcing his attentions upon the disinclined object of his desire, this union will ultimately destroy him. Robert Young likens this relationship to a Hegelian structure of domination and servitude whose sadomasochistic component is reversible. The white master who forces himself upon the unwilling slave inevitably contributes to his civilisation's decline by producing offspring whose racial mixture further corrupts the purity of his ancestor's blood.[145] This self-destructive civilising instinct could be seen as the Aryan Achilles heel. The noble purity of Aryan blood is contaminated by such a sexual encounter: white blood is diluted; noble pedigree mongrelised. As Young suggests, 'civilization possesses its own tragic flaw, because the Aryan races are impelled by a civilizing instinct to mix their blood with the very races that will bring about their downfall'.[146] Herein lies the inherent, tragic paradox of Gobineau's theory: civilisation, through its very creation sows the seeds of its inevitable destruction.

[144] Young, 108.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.

Racial Typology

The articulation of Gobineau's conception of civilisation, is, as we have seen, based upon a natural inequality of the races. When these unequal parties mix, the noble are debased and the debased are briefly ennobled, until homogenous mediocrity reigns. This final state of human entropy is the inevitable outcome of inexorable miscegenation. To explicate his doomsday treatise, Gobineau resorts to rather banal racial typology that seems a reiteration of past and contemporary theorists. Racial typology refers to a model of race founded upon three essential arguments: firstly, variations in the constitution and behaviour of the individual are an expression of differences between underlying types of a relatively permanent kind, each suited to its own zone; secondly, social categories in the long-run reflect and are aligned with the natural categories that produce them; and thirdly, individuals of a particular race are repelled by other types.[147] George Cuvier, the comparative anatomist whose book, *Règne Animal*, is considered pivotal in the establishment of type as the pre-eminent conceptual model of race and whose work is cited by Gobineau, writes,

> Quoique l'espèce humaine paraisse unique, puisque tous les individus peuvent se mêler indistinctement, et produire des individus féconds, on y remarque de certaines conformations héréditaires qui constituent ce qu'on nomme des *races*.[148]

The use of the word 'race' in this passage takes on the appearance of 'species' in that it defines groups based upon physical characteristics that are inherited and unchanging. According to Cuvier, despite intermixture, certain hereditary traits function as a continuous chain linking groups of people to one another from, one could assume, time immemorial. A proponent of permanent racial types, Gobineau,

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[147] Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 43.
[148] Georges Cuvier, *Le Règne Animal distribué d'après son organization, pour servir de base de l'histoire naturelle des animaux et d'introduction à l'anatomie comparée*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimérie de A. Belin, 1817) 94.

like Cuvier, nonetheless pays lip service to monogenism – the belief in a single origin of humanity – and its biblical foundations. Gobineau argues that while all humans descend from one source, due to a series of natural disasters over the course of human history, this single species split off into three distinct racial groups that not only differ dramatically from one another but are also placed on a hierarchical scale.[149] Common descent is responsible for the vague physical similarities of shape and the ability to copulate interracially. He argues that even if we do not know what revolutions could have occurred in the physical organisation of peoples since the dawn of history, we can still remark that the races that we recognise today have remained for at least the last three or four thousand years in a state of relative purity and have not changed notably their appearance.[150] Thus, since we have moved so far away from primal man and any notion of unity of species, we must adopt a polygenist practice when discussing racial distinction.[151] Gobineau acknowledges that this elemental racial purity is an ideal that never existed historically. 'Les races actuelles sont donc des branches bien distinctes d'une ou de plusieurs souches primitives perdues, que les temps historiques n'ont

[149] Gobineau refers to Cuvier's *Discours sur les Révolutions du Globe*, in which Cuvier writes, 'Ce que cette nature, si terriblement douée, exerçait alors sur elle-même de modifications devenues aujourd'hui impossibles, elle le pouvait aussi sur l'espèce humaine, et ne le peut plus désormais.' Gobineau, 1: 140-1.

[150] Ibid. 1: 124.

[151] Ibid. 1: 142-3. Polygenesis posits several distinct species of humans, separately created and each adapted to their own environmental zone with the necessary inherited characteristics. One of the major arguments used by this particular school of thought was that there was not enough time in the history of the world for humans to diversify to the extent to which they had. Most scholars still accepted a biblical chronology of human history, which assumed the age of the universe (and humanity) to be between five and six thousand years old. Leon Poliakov, 'Gobineau and His Contemporaries' in *Racism*, ed. Martin Bulmer and John Solomos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 53. In Banton's *Racial Theories*, there is a reference to Samuel George Morton's *Crania Americana* (published in 1839) in which the author uses a calculation that 'Noah and his family left the Ark 4,179 years previously whereas Ethiopians were known to exist 3,445 years ago; recent discoveries, he [Morton] added, made it clear that only by a miracle, could the Negro race have developed out of the Caucasian in the course of 734 years', 38. The other presupposition needed to support the polygenesis school was that fertility should not be a criterion of species. While physical evidence of miscegenation in the colonies would categorically dispute this claim, polygenesis proponents such as Josiah Clark Nott and Edward Long argued that much like the union of the horse and donkey, white-black sexual relations would produce either infertile offspring or offspring that would become increasingly infertile in subsequent generations. Indeed, the term 'mulatto' or 'mulâtre' comes from the late sixteenth century Spanish word, 'mulato' meaning mule. Sollors, 128.

jamais connues'.[152] This does not stop him, however, from describing the permanent physical and character traits of each race that can only be (further) tempered by hybridisation, which of course is inevitable. '…Et ces races, différant entre elles par les formes extérieures et les proportions des membres…ne réussissent à perdre leurs traits principaux qu'à la suite et par la puissance des croisements.' [153]

Like other polygenists, Gobineau maintains an idea of a lost racial purity, while at the same time he adroitly acknowledges the incontrovertible proof of inter-racial fertility. He divides humanity into the conventional categories of black, yellow, and white, conceding that he chose these terms mainly because they were already established in contemporary discourse.[154] While they may not be perfect appellations, they function well enough for his purposes to designate the three racial categories that are, for him, 'les trois éléments purs et primitifs de l'humanité'.[155] These races are then judged according to a single standard of beauty, strength, and intellectual capacity. This alternation between science and aesthetics is considered to be a constitutive element of modern racism. 'Human nature can be defined in aesthetic terms, with significant stress on the outward

[152] Gobineau, 1: 137.
[153] Ibid.
[154] 'Mais, à moins d'inventer moi-même des noms nouveaux, ce que je ne me crois pas en droit de faire, il faut bien me résoudre à choisir, dans la terminologie en usage, des désignations non pas absolument bonnes, mais moins défectueuses que les autres…' Ibid. 1: 150.
[155] Ibid. Linked to this racial hierarchy are its biblical foundations that posit Noah's three sons as the original founders of the three races: Japheth (white or Caucasian), Shem (yellow or Mongoloid), and Ham (black or *Nègre*). The Hamitic curse is often referenced in nineteenth-century racialist texts. It refers to a passage in Genesis after the Flood, in which Noah gets drunk and falls asleep naked in his tent. Ham sees his father naked and informs his brothers. Shem and Japheth place a cloak over their father, while averting their eyes to his nakedness. 'When Noah woke from his drunken sleep, he learnt what his youngest son had done to him, and said: "Cursed be Canaan, / Slave of slaves, / Shall he be to his brothers."' (Genesis 9: 22-25) Ham is described in Genesis 9:18 as the founding father of Canaan. In his effort to trace the origins of the link between Ham and the black race, Adam Lively finds some evidence in early Jewish writings that connote the Hebrew *Ham* as 'dark' and 'hot' and Talmudic and Midrashic sources that suggest that 'Ham was smitten in his skin' and that Noah told Ham 'your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned'. Lively, 20-21.

physical signs of inner rationality and harmony.'[156] In *Essai*, beauty is not a relative quality but one that is essential and universal, of which the white race provides the best example.

> J'ai déjà constaté que, de tous les groupes humains, ceux qui appartiennent aux nations européennes et à leur descendance sont les plus beaux. Pour en être pleinement convaincu, il suffit de comparer les types variés répandus sur le globe, et l'on voit que depuis la construction et le visage…jusqu'à la taille élevée, aux nobles proportions de Charlemagne, jusqu'à l'intelligente régularité des traits de Napoléon, jusqu'à l'imposante majesté qui respire sur le visage royal de Louis XIV, il y a une série de gradations par laquelle les peuples qui ne sont pas du sang des blancs approchent de la beauté, mais ne l'atteignent pas. [157]

Gobineau's observations of human diversity are tempered by a deep ethnocentricity that takes as its starting point the inherent physical and cultural superiority of Europe. It is according to this measuring stick that all other human groups are judged. The premise of unity of species allows him to appraise variations of it according to the same criteria. Assessment of value is based upon the extent to which a certain population possesses traits that Gobineau considers universal, such as a conception of an absolute aesthetic based upon European standards of beauty. All human populations approach this standard to greater or lesser degrees.

In their essential form, the three racial types exist in a natural hierarchy. Blacks are the lowest of the races, most closely associated with bestiality. 'Le caractère d'animalité empreint dans la forme de son bassin lui impose sa destinée, dès l'instant de la conception. Elle ne sortira jamais du cercle intellectuel le plus

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[156] George Mosse, 'Eighteenth-Century Foundations', *Racism*, ed. Martin Bulmer and John Solomos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 41. David Bindman similarly argues that 'the connection between outward appearance, especially of the face and the proclivity of the 'soul' towards virtue or vice, lay at the heart of one of the most insistent debates in eighteenth-century aesthetics'. *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2002) 46.

[157] Gobineau, 1: 155.

restreint.'[158] The black man is known for his sensuality (called grossière and odieuse), the variability of his moods, and his incomprehension of the difference between virtue and vice.[159] 'Si ces facultés pensantes sont médiocres ou même nulles, il possède dans le désir, et par suite dans la volonté, une intensité souvent terrible.'[160] The yellow man, as antithesis to the black man, is his superior. Gobineau first demonstrates this superiority by noting that the yellow man's nose and chin show none of the crude protuberances of the *nègre*. Where the black man is physically strong, the yellow is weak and apathetic. While he does not possess the moral excesses of the black man, he is feeble of will and mediocre in all things. However, he is practical, materialistic, and respectful of rules and while he is not imaginative or theoretical, he is capable of adopting and appreciating theories and inventions. 'On voit qu'ils sont supérieurs aux nègres. C'est une populace et une petite bourgeoisie que tout civilisateur désirerait choisir pour base de sa société: ce n'est cependant pas de quoi créer cette société ni lui donner du nerf, de la beauté et de l'action.'[161] Thus, having established the proletariat and the bourgeoisie of humanity, Gobineau now goes on to describe its rightful aristocracy. The white man is known for his energetic intelligence, extraordinary physical strength, and instinctual desire for order. The reigning importance of honour in all action and the desire for conquest (*la notion civilisatrice*) separate him from both the yellow and black races.[162] In addition, the white man is aware of his inherent racial superiority.

In order to account for the decline of civilisation, Gobineau fashions his racial theory based upon a classist notion of race that attributes to the white race an aristocratic pedigree, the nobility of which is a distant memory in our increasingly

[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid. 1: 215.
[160] Ibid. 1: 214.
[161] Ibid. 1: 216.
[162] Ibid. 1: 217.

egalitarian world.[163] Gobineau's emphasis on racial typology provides another means by which to defend a hierarchical and firmly differentiated class system. Preservation and separation hold primacy in Gobineau's social model. The link between class and race is taken up later by at least two other prominent racial theorists of the century – Ernest Renan and Gustave Le Bon. In Renan's 1871 *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, he re-articulates Gobineau's race-class hierarchy: 'La nature a fait une race d'ouvriers, c'est la race chinoise (…); – une race de travailleurs de la terre, c'est le nègre (…); – une race de maîtres et de soldats, c'est la race européenne'.[164] Like Gobineau, underlying racial inequity legitimates imperialist enterprise. Renan adds:

> La conquête d'un pays de race inférieure par une race supérieure, qui s'y établit pour le gouverner n'a rien de choquant. […] Autant les conquêtes entre races égales doivent être blâmées, autant la régénération des races inférieures ou abâtardies par les races supérieures est dans l'ordre providentiel de l'humanité.[165]

However, Renan's thesis lacks the profound pessimism of Gobineau's; whereas the former sees imperialism as part of a grander eugenic project, the latter ascribes to the miscegenation inherent in imperialism a more apocalyptic tone. Le Bon also asserts a natural race-class hierarchy, but his focus rests primarily upon the extent to which the European class strata correspond to a racial hierarchy. 'Les couches les plus basses des sociétés européennes sont homologues des êtres primitifs.' 'Il suffirait (…) de faire intervenir le temps, pour voir les couches supérieures d'une population séparées intellectuellement des couches inférieures par une distance aussi grande que celle qui sépare le blanc du nègre, ou même le nègre du singe.'[166]

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[163] As Michael Bidiss advises, 'We need to remember that Gobineau's racism originates from his revulsion against a society that had rejected the virtues of nobility and that his social pessimism begins as fundamentally a matter of class-consciousness', 105.
[164] Ernest Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, ed. P.E. Charvet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950) 62.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Gustave Le Bon, *Les Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* (1894 reprint; F. Alcan, 1902) 27 and 37.

Some scholars argue that racial theories developed in the nineteenth century were primarily in response to a need to explain social divisions within European society, and not, as is generally thought, to have come out of European conquest and colonialism.[167] Daniel Pick contends that racial anthropology was not only meant to distinguish 'West from Rest' but to establish 'primitive' areas and groups within the home country. Likewise, Kenan Malik suggests that the positivist vision of the nineteenth century promoted a doctrine of a 'naturally-sanctioned social order' and that racial theory thus provided legitimacy for social inequality as it was articulated in a class system.[168] Michael Bidiss, the well-known Gobinist scholar, surmises that Gobineau's racism originates in class-consciousness that revolts against what he sees as a rejection of aristocratic values and pedigree.[169] Gobineau taps into a discourse of race, which then allows him to defend waning nobility under its guise. Young notes,

> The profoundly conservative basis of Gobineau's position emerges very clearly […]: the 'inequality' of the races, the different aspects of which he spends much time elaborating, means that the capacity does not exist for every human race to become equal to every other, and as far as this argument is concerned, race is indistinguishable from class.[170]

The genesis of race and class stereotypes runs the risk of turning into a chicken and egg riddle and no doubt, the truth lies somewhere in the middle: nineteenth century discourses of race certainly were affected by an attempt to articulate class differences within European society. Concurrently, the eighteenth-century interest in human variation and the popularity of racial typology based upon Euro-centric

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[167] Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (London: MacMillan Oress, 1996) 80.
[168] Malik, 100.
[169] Bidiss, 105.
[170] Young, 114. Again, however, this relationship between race and class does not seem to have been an innovation of Gobineau. Adam Lively suggests that 'throughout the Middle Ages, the three orders of society were often explained with reference to descent from Noah's sons, Japheth being the father of the nobles, Shem the father of the clerks, and Ham the father of the serfs'. Lively, 21.

values and aesthetics created a vocabulary, which could be expanded to include all those within European society that differed from the increasingly powerful and normative bourgeoisie. Regardless of which comes first, metaphors of race were used to describe class and vice versa.

Metaphors are not unidirectional vectors; instead they force an interdependent interaction upon the two things being compared.[171] Nancy Stepan elucidates this 'interaction' theory by introducing the metaphor, 'The poor are the Negroes of Europe'. Through this metaphor, we assume a structural similarity between the two things being compared. The European poor gain the qualities generally associated with the 'Negro' and vice versa. The poor are seen as a separate race distinct from the rest of European civilisation, primitive. The '"Negro" is seen as shiftless, idle, given to drink, part of the social remnant bound to be left behind in the march toward progress'.[172] Stepan argues that the potential of the metaphor to create new knowledge by constructing similarities between apparently disparate things, has assumed a powerful role in science. Max Black suggests that the metaphor 'selects, emphasises, suppresses, and organises features' of reality. We 'discover' associations that hitherto had not existed in such a structured form.

[171] Nancy Stepan discusses Max Black's 'interaction' theory of metaphor as it relates to the conflation of gender and race in nineteenth-century scientific discourse. Black's theory argues that metaphors 'join together and bring into cognitive and emotional relation with each other two different things, or systems of things, not normally joined'. Nancy Leys Stepan, 'Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science', *Science, Race, and Ethnicity*, ed. John P. Jackson, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 5-21; 11 Metaphor is not simply literal comparison of two unrelated things but rather metaphor is the creation of meaning, the 'product of the interaction between the two parts of the metaphor', 12. The two things tied together by metaphor react upon one another and invest each other with new meaning based upon their figurative interface.
[172] Ibid.

Race and Gender

Added to the systemisation of the three races into class distinctions – the black proletariat, the yellow bourgeoisie, and the white aristocracy – is a metaphoric conflation of race and gender. Gobineau argues that in each race exist simultaneously a masculine and a feminine element. He uses the Hindu symbols of Praktiri (the feminine principle) and Pouroucha (the masculine principle) to articulate this phenomenon, which can be related broadly to the Chinese yin and yang.[173] The masculine principle is defined by materialism and physicality. The feminine principle is notable for its contemplative, metaphysical nature. An oscillation occurs between the two principles in every civilisation, and societies can be differentiated according to the predominant gendered set of traits they possess. The yellow race is dominated by materialist desires (too masculine) and the black race by a greater sensibility and imagination (too feminine).[174] Gobineau is careful to show the necessity of both constituents but argues that the right balance of these forces is only attained by the white race. This balance does not entail equal portions of each component, but rather is defined by a more masculine orientation. He provides an example of a successful people who possess more active (masculine) than contemplative (feminine) attributes:

> Appartiennent-elles à la série des races plus actives que pensantes, on les verra perfectionner leurs instruments de travail, leurs armes, leur parure; avoir un gouvernement où les guerriers domineront sur les prêtres, où la science des échanges acquerra un certain développement, où l'esprit mercantile paraîtra déjà assez accusé.[175]

This racial conception is remarkably similar to Gustav Klemm's active and passive races in his *Allgemeine Cultur-Geschichte der Menschheit*, published in 1849. According to Klemm, miscegenation between these two distinct racial groupings

[173] Gobineau, 1: 86.
[174] Ibid. 1: 84-5.
[175] Ibid. 1: 85.

would inevitably lead to a unified and egalitarian society – for Gobineau, anathema. In a footnote, Gobineau refers to Klemm's book and asserts that while he has not read it, he is not surprised that the same idea of active and passive races would have occurred to the authors almost simultaneously since it merely reinforces the veracity of both theories.[176] This dialectical model of active/male – passive/female is a key element in both authors' visions of miscegenation and articulates an important power-inequality that reinforces the theme of domination/capitulation.

The dialectical male and female currents running through all peoples further sexualise the relationship between races. Despite Gobineau's effort to show that the gendered elements are concurrent (though not necessarily equal) in each race, his historiography reveals the masculine, imperialist dominance of the white race in relation to the others whose passivity and reluctance to miscegenate are evidence of their purer/less developed state. By gendering the races, Gobineau secures miscegenation as the basis of human relations and the engine of human history. Moreover, the law of attraction and repulsion that underpins miscegenation reveals the violence and tragedy inherent in Gobineau's theory. By attributing gendered characteristics to the races, the violence of colonial conquest is naturalised and rationalised. The active, white race, characterised as appropriately masculine, must overcome the reluctance of the desirable and more passive (see feminine) yellow and black races in order to create civilisations. Gobineau's specific metaphor of a feminine black race in his text refers to his thesis that blacks possess qualities and characteristics that fall within the culturally accepted parameters of femininity such as passivity, affectivity, imitativeness and natural inferiority. This relationship is placed in direct opposition to the generally accepted notion of masculinity as robust, vigorous, original, and active, and as such linked

[176] Ibid. 1: 86.

to the higher races.[177] Given our assertion of the multi-directional power of metaphor, not only does the black race assume the characteristics of the feminine model but the (white) woman assumes characteristics associated with the black race.[178] Its association with blackness only enhances feminine inferiority. White male positional superiority is reinforced by this metaphoric conflation.

The white male desire for the coloured female Other requires her rape and ends in his debasement. The metaphoric feminising of terra incognita ('virgin' territory) has a long tradition in European exploration and expansion, and is not an innovation of Gobineau. However, as Anne McClintock rightly points out, not only is the feminine land a 'symptom of male megalomania, it also betrays acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss'.[179] She offers the example of a famous drawing of the 'discovery' of America by Jan van der Straet (ca. 1575). In the colonial scene depicted, Vespucci confronts the virgin land of America, portrayed as a naked and welcoming indigenous woman. 'Vespucci, the godlike arrival, is destined to inseminate her with the male seeds of civilization, fructify the wilderness and quell the riotous scenes of cannibalism in the background.'[180] While this quintessential imperial scene represents masculine dominion and conquest over the erotically-charged and submissive feminine Other, it also expresses an underlying anxiety regarding this

[177] This metaphoric gendering of races is not new when Gobineau publishes his book. In 1839, Gustav Eichtal, a self-proclaimed Negrophile, writes, 'Le noir me paraît être la *race femme* dans la famille humaine, comme le blanc est la *race mâle*. De même que la femme, le noir est privé des facultés politiques et scientifiques; il n'a jamais créé un grand état, il n'est point astronome, mathématicien, naturaliste; il n'a rien fait en mécanique industrielle. Mais, par contre, il possède au plus haut degré les qualités du cœur, les affections et les sentiments domestiques; il est homme d'*intérieur*. Comme la femme, il aime aussi avec passion la parure, la danse, le chant; et le peu d'exemples que j'ai vus de sa poésie native sont des idylles charmantes'. Gustave Eichtal and Ismayl Urbain, *Lettres sur la race noir et la race blanche* (Paris: Chez Paulin, 1839) 22. Cited in Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) 122.

[178] For more on the relationship between race and gender, see Anne McClintock's chapter entitled, '"Massa" and Maids: Power and Desire in the Imperial Metropolis' from her book, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 75-131.

[179] McClintock, 24.

[180] Ibid. 26.

potentially dangerous land. In the background of the drawing, we glimpse apparently female cannibals roasting a human leg on a fire pit. While in the foreground, the male body is invested with power and authority over the passive, naked woman; in the background a male body is dismembered by active indigenous women. 'In this way, the augural scene of discovery becomes a scene of ambivalence, suspended between an imperial megalomania, with its fantasy of unstoppable rapine – and a contradictory fear of engulfment, with its fantasy of dismemberment and emasculation.'[181] In this scene, we are not far away from Gobineau's paradoxical vision. The concomitance of mastery and loss, rape and emasculation, fertility and degeneration, structures Gobineau's dialectical model of human history. At the same time passive and resistant, the yellow/black woman succumbs to the overwhelming force of the white male invader. His domination of her (and by extension the land that she personifies) brings about the dilution of his blood and the degeneration of his offspring. The feminine Other, portrayed in van der Straet's drawing as cannibalistic, is both a figure of desire and of destruction.

Degeneracy

Gobineau's theory reflects contemporary discourses of degeneration that relied upon racial degeneracy to provide the 'metaphors and modes of analysis' necessary to explain or elucidate the seemingly universal process of degeneration.[182]

> Je pense donc que le mot *dégénéré*, s'appliquant à un peuple, doit signifier et signifie que ce peuple n'a plus la valeur intrinsèque qu'autrefois il possédait, parce qu'il n'a plus dans ses veines le même sang dont des alliages successifs ont graduellement modifié la valeur; autrement dit, qu'avec le même nom, il n'a pas conservé la même race que ses fondateurs; enfin,

[181] Ibid. 26-27.
[182] Stepan, 'Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places' in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, ed. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, 97-120 (New York: Columbia University Press) 97.

> que l'homme de la décadence, celui qu'on appelle l'homme *dégénéré*, est un produit différent, au point de vue ethnique, du héros des grandes époques.[183]

More than simply casting sanguine impurity as degenerative, Gobineau implies that the white race is the ideal by which the other races are judged to be deficient. His interest rests upon the tragedy of the besmirchment of *white* blood and the debasement of *its* aristocratic heritage.[184] Gobineau makes it clear that he does not assume that the original human being, from whom all races are meant to originate, was white. Rather, he suggests this 'Adam' was a complete stranger to all of the current races; each of the permanent types developed from him.[185] However, as we have seen, while his typological model conflicts with the notion of a single origin of humanity, his monogenic pretensions permit him to base his exposition of human difference upon an ethnocentric standard of measure. This allows him to imply that the yellow and black races not only serve the degeneration of the white race, but also seem to represent degenerative versions of a white aesthetic and racial standard.

The ambient notion that France and her people were in a state of decline was being articulated by physicians, philosophers, intellectuals, and artists alike, but Bénédict Augustin Morel, in his 1857 *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles, et morales de l'espèce humaine*, was the first to suggest a medical root to this general malaise and to identify quantifiable pathologies associated with the notion of degeneration. In his treatise, he defines degeneration as a deviation from the normal, original type that causes disparate physical, intellectual, and moral

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[183] Gobineau, 1: 24.

[184] 'La race blanche possédait originairement le monopole de la beauté, de l'intelligence et de la force. A la suite de ses unions avec les autres variétés, il se rencontra des métis beaux sans être forts, forts sans être intelligents, intelligents avec beaucoup de laideur et de débilité. Il se trouva aussi que la plus grande abondance possible du sang des blancs, quand elle s'accumulait, non pas d'un seul coup, mais par couches successives, dans une nation, ne lui apportait plus ses prérogatives naturelles', Gobineau, 1: 219. J.M. Coetzee suggests that Gobineau's concept of blood is like that of wine, which is watered down by each mixture, more specifically, white blood is watered down by black, 147.

[185] Gobineau, 1: 143-4.

illnesses.[186] It is a cumulative disorder that increases in severity with every subsequent generation until finally the degenerate line dies out.

> La théorie des dégénérescences dans l'espèce humaine repose sur ce fait général et important qu'étant donné un principe maladif qui s'attaque à la constitution des ascendants, ce principe…devient pour les descendants le premier terme d'une série des phénomènes pathologiques…qui finissent par amener la décadence progressive de telle ou telle famille, et parfois de telle ou telle race. Cette décadence est fatale…[187]

In his definition of degeneration, we come across two key components: the concept of an original type from which deviation and difference can be measured, and the cumulative effect of heredity that can have fatal consequences. While Morel imbues the term, *dégénérescence,* with medical meaning, it seems remarkably Christian in its origin. At the heart of his medical theory is man's fall from paradise and perfection. This fall is only amplified with each subsequent generation. Sander Gilman similarly suggests that the Christian fall from grace was a foundational component of degeneration theory, but he also suggests that sexuality was perceived as teleological: human progress culminated in the adult, male European in opposition to the Other (child, woman, black), who is evidence not only of an earlier stage of human development but also proof of The Fall. [188] As we have seen, Gobineau's *Essai*, published just three years before Morel's book, is similarly concerned with a teleological theory of human history pivoting upon man's fall from the grace of racial purity and culminating in the nullity of human existence. This last stage of decadence will evidence 'le dernier terme de la

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[186] B.A Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles, et morales de l'espèce humaine* (Paris: Ballière, 1857) 5.

[187] Morel, *De la formation du type dans les variétés dégénérées* (Paris: Ballière, 1864) 17.

[188] Sander Gilman, 'Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race of Theory', *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, ed. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman, 72-96 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). 'The projection of deviant sexuality onto the Other during the nineteenth century was understood in theological as well as teleological terms. The aberrant sexuality of the child was proof of man's fall from grace. It seldom manifested itself, as mankind had been saved through Christ's sacrifice, but its rare appearance was proof of the potential within each adult of regression to the state before redemption.' Gilman, 87-88.

médiocrité dans tous les genres: médiocrité de force physique, médiocrité de beauté, médiocrité d'aptitudes intellectuelles, on peut presque dire néant'.[189]

Much work has been undertaken in the last twenty years to study the role of sexuality in nineteenth-century theories of degeneracy, and in particular the relationship between sexuality and conceptions of class, race, and gender. [190] By the late nineteenth century, Stepan argues (as do Sander Gilman and George Mosse) the signs of inferiority and degeneracy that in the early years of the century were conferred primarily upon 'lower races' were now being used to describe the urban poor, prostitutes, criminals, and the insane. These '"degenerate" types, whose deformed skulls, protruding jaws, and low brain weights marked them as "races apart"', were evidence of the internal threat of social decay within the borders of the heretofore-civilised world.[191] The degenerate was considered both racially distinct and the catalyst for the degeneration of the racial whole. At the centre of this ambient apprehension were the conceptions of the degenerate as visibly, racially different, and the fear of degeneracy, an invisible virus that threatened all levels of society. This apprehension was expressed by the fear of the lower classes and the concern that the disease of degeneracy had infected all classes and races.[192] The terrifying invisibility of degenerative contagion heightened the need to identify degenerates by exterior signs, but it also implied the central paradoxical concern that these signs might not be easily recognisable, especially as the virus spread throughout society through interracial and interclass intercourse.

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[189] Gobineau, 2: 560.

[190] For a more in-depth study of nineteenth-century conceptions of degeneracy and the links between gender, class, and race, see George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985); Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), and 'Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race of Theory', *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*; and Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

[191] Stepan, 'Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places', 98.

[192] Kenan, 110-111.

The Métisse*: A Footnote*

The paradoxical nature of *métissage* as both the creator and destroyer of civilisation is, in a sense, anthropomorphised in the figure of the *métisse*. After having argued fervently that the products of racial intermixture are victims of human degeneration, Gobineau asserts in a footnote that mulatto women and derivatives thereof are the most beautiful of the interracial unions:

> Il est à remarquer que les mélanges les plus heureux, au point de vue de la beauté, sont ceux qui sont formés par l'hymen des blancs et des noirs. On n'a qu'à mettre en parallèle le charme souvent puissant des mulâtresses, des capresses, des quarteronnes, avec les produits des jaunes et des blancs, comme les femmes russes et hongroises. La comparaison ne tourne pas à l'avantage de ces dernières.[193]

According to Gobineau's own logic that posits a racial hierarchy in which the black race is the most debased and the white the most exalted, one would assume that the métis product of such a union would be a striking example of devolution. We have already noted Gobineau's ethnocentric aesthetic for which his commendation of the *métisse*'s allure would seem a contradiction. Indeed, he argues elsewhere that those who come nearest to Europeans in beauty are from Semitic and Aryan extractions that are 'les moins rabaissées par le contact noir'.[194] However, in what seems to be a striking about-face, Gobineau acknowledges in this footnote the beauty and charm of the *métisse*. According to his racial typology, Gobineau suggests a characteristic sensuality associated with the black race, to which the *métisse* is related and which would account perhaps for her 'charme souvent puissant'. While in the passage, she is described as the product of miscegenation, this phrase suggests her role as the catalyst for future

[193] Gobineau, 1: 155.
[194] Ibid.

miscegenation. Her charm seduces and thus perpetuates itself in her (female) offspring: the footnote refers only to mixed-race women, which suggests that the *métisse* is regarded as both the progeny of the white male and his sexual partner. In this model of sexual conquest predicated upon gendered race, incest between white father and *métisse* daughter is structurally conceivable.

In this way, the *métisse* functions as a kind of linchpin in Gobineau's exposition of degeneracy: she is the decadent product of – and the desirable partner for – miscegenation. Acknowledged as more attractive than her yellow-white half-sisters, the *métisse* is the site where great beauty is matched by inevitable decline. In the passage, the dialectic of attraction and repulsion that organises Gobineau's exposition of race relations is embodied in a single woman. We have seen the way race, gender, and class metaphors interact to illustrate the ideal (implicitly original) type of white, aristocratic masculinity, as well as deviations from this norm. The *métisse*, as part of this interactive system of comparative associations, is gendered, coloured, and classed as different and deviant. Further, she spreads degeneration with her powerfully seductive body. She incites white, male victims, effeminises their masculinity and dilutes their blood.

If we re-examine Gobineau we recognise that in his historical model of civilisation, interracial sexual unions form the building blocks of societies and nations. While he may long nostalgically for an ahistorical utopia of racial purity, his vision of races is based upon mixture. Even his notion of the feminine and masculine components of each race is predicated upon a union of opposites. According to Gobineau, nations are created from a blending of masculine and feminine, white and coloured. And while this blending is finally decadent, it is natural, inevitable. Alterity, then, is a key element for sexual congress/conquest. The coloured woman, who as a function of her race and gender stands as ultimately distinct from the white male standard, is naturally attractive to the civilising conqueror. She is, in fact, so attractive to him that he overcomes her

reluctance and his own lingering distaste for the inferior races. In Gobineau's racialist paradigm, interracial sex could be seen as the natural and necessary fusion of opposites. It could be argued that the attraction toward the coloured woman, the Other, comes from an instinctual desire for unity or completion. The *métisse*, in this instance, could be seen as a symbol of a union between the most disparate of the three races. However, a longing for unity is thwarted by the notion of inevitable, weakening depletion that will lead inexorably to the general debasement and mediocrity of the individual and the race. Thus is the paradoxical pessimism of Gobineau: unity through mixture will ultimately lead to nihilism.

The *métisse* is a structurally ambiguous figure in *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines.* A symbol of unity and destruction, the *métisse* demonstrates Gobineau's ambivalence toward the whole conception of *métissage*. Gobineau's racial hierarchy is founded to account for the positional superiority of whiteness/masculinity/aristocracy. At the same time, however, we observe that the *métisse* undermines these attributes of superiority: the very racial hierarchy that endows the *métisse* with her inferior attributes is challenged by her ability to dilute, debase, and effeminise her ostensibly superior lover. Blood is mixed; alterity is attenuated; the white male lover is brought closer to her level. These are the dangers of *métissage* of which the *métisse* is a most popular symbol. A product of a racialist system that is concerned with identifying and maintaining racial difference, she challenges that system by blurring its boundaries.

Conclusion

Gobineau's organic vision of civilisation and human history is founded upon clearly dialectical principles: the constant interplay of the male-female currents between and among races, the push and pull of attraction and repulsion, and the pathetic assertion of a past ideal purity through the admission of contemporary impurity. Each of these dialectical relationships reveals Gobineau's conception of

human society to be fraught with (sexual) conflict and tragic contradiction. The *métisse*, rather than simply a footnote in the epic of human history, is emblematic of its decadent miscegenation. She is a figure around which these thematic strands and dialectical relationships pivot and interface. As we have seen, the concomitance of desire and death generates a portrait of the white male as both conqueror and victim; and the coloured female object of his desire as, if not acquiescent then attainable, and if passive, equally threatening. Here we recall Young's reference to a reversible sadomasochistic component in Gobineau's conception of interracial sexual relations, which reverberates in all of the representations of the *métisse* that we are studying.

Desire and death, pleasure and pain, attraction and repulsion, these thematic strands that we have seen articulated in *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* – as well as in *Les Mystères de Paris* and *Le Roman d'un spahi* – similarly are woven around Émile Zola's eponymous *métisse* character in *Thérèse Raquin.* As we have learned in this chapter, the *métisse* is often gendered, coloured, and classed in such a way as to exhibit her deviation from the ideal type of white, aristocratic masculinity, and thus to demonstrate the threat she poses to her white, male victims whom she effeminises and depletes.[195] Zola's vision of degenerative sexuality does not differ significantly from that of Gobineau: he too is interested in determinist typology as he articulates a causal link between the racial heredity of the eponymous mulatto heroine and her moral downfall that ends with murder, prostitution and suicide. In addition, the particularly striking psychic collusion between the *métisse* and her crude, lower class lover suggests a natural affinity between the non-white races and the plebeian class. The sadomasochistic element, which seems to be an integral part of Gobineau's conception of interracial sex, is

[195] Whereas Gobineau's ideal type is aristocratic in nature, it is the rising bourgeoisie that was generally considered to be normative. George Mosse argues that the making of the normative bourgeois identity depended upon visual markers of difference that could determine social membership or exclusion. All those outside the respectable norms erected by bourgeois society were blended together: the crude and bestial lower classes, the decadent aristocracy, Jews, Blacks, homosexuals, criminals, androgynes, etc. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality,* 11-13.

depicted in all of its macabre detail in Zola's novel. His brutish characters live in a world of violent and lurid sex where power shifts and degradation are inevitable. Moreover, in Zola's novel we see a striking example of the debasement and dilution of white masculinity that Gobineau fears in the transformation of Thérèse Raquin's lover from roughly masculine to delicately effeminate. However, just as in Gobineau's essay, *Thérèse Raquin* articulates the enrichment, albeit brief, that comes from *métissage*: the white male lover is endowed with a new artistic ability that seems to come from his transformation at the hands of the *métisse*, Thérèse. Both Gobineau's essay and Zola's novel accentuate the degenerative effect of *métissage* upon the white male with recourse to hierarchical typology and yet both paradoxically suggest a creative power that can emerge from an ultimately ill-fated interracial union.

Chapter Four

Thérèse Raquin: The Pathological, Coloured *Femme Fatale*

In this chapter I will suggest that by colouring his heroine, Thérèse Raquin, Zola is able to tap into contemporary fears of degeneration and decadence linked to uncontrolled (deviant) sexuality, which satisfies not only the ostensible scientist in him but also his self-proclaimed taste for the depraved. *Thérèse Raquin* not only contains elements of a clinical case study but also of Decadence *avant la lettre* with its obsession with flesh, lust, and abnormality, and its ambivalent conception of degeneracy as strangely seductive and creative. The interplay of the author's naturalist ethos with his decadent predilection creates a fascinating portrait and expands upon the motifs of prostitution, performance, and unmasking, which we have already examined in chapter one. The rather paradoxical relationship between the two seemingly distinctive gazes (naturalist and erotic) upon the coloured female body, come together in *Thérèse Raquin*. Thérèse is depicted as pathological and as a symbol of decadence, an object whose degenerative sexuality not only seduces and destroys, but also briefly stimulates artistic achievement. Using the metaphoric triangulation of race-class-gender to articulate difference from the norm, the métisse's pathological sexuality is linked both to lower-class brutishness and to toxic female desire embodied in the prostitute. Zola profits from contemporary 'scientific' theories that examine degeneration, temperament, and nervous disorders. Nevertheless, beneath the guise of positivist materialism exists a more macabre aesthetic that centres on violence, sex, and death.

One of Zola's early novels, *Thérèse Raquin* was first published under the title of *Un mariage d'amour* in *Le Figaro* on 24 December 1866. In September 1867, it had been re-titled, re-written and was republished in book form. While Zola had published short stories, novels, and articles before this, *Thérèse Raquin* is cited as

the novel that launched the author's career. Predating his famous collection of novels, *Les Rougon-Macquart, histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire, Thérèse Raquin* introduces the positivist methodology that Zola would employ to expound upon two themes that preoccupied him all of his career: the determinist nature of heredity and inexorable biological degeneracy. *Thérèse Raquin* is the story of a young métisse who leads a cloistered and claustrophobic life in a small petit bourgeois family in Paris. Married to her ailing cousin, Camille, Thérèse lives a passive and monotonous existence until her husband brings home the virile Laurent, an old friend of the family. Laurent and Thérèse embark upon a torrid affair. The lovers, not content with the clandestine nature of their affair, decide to murder Camille so that they can be married. After drowning Camille in the Seine, Laurent and Thérèse are free to marry. However, neither is prepared for the physiological effects of fear and guilt that hound them and drive them both to distraction. Their relationship degenerates into raw, brutal hatred and co-dependency. Finally, unable to bear it any further, they carry out a simultaneous suicide, originally intended to be a double murder. Thus ends the novel.

Rewriting: Colouring Inside the Lines

Un mariage d'amour was Zola's attempt to adapt a journal article into novella form. The basic story of two lovers who plot the murder of the cuckolded husband was based upon an actual series of events that took place in the commune of Gordes in Vaucluse and was reported in the press in 1861. The events were then made into a serial thriller by Adolphe Belot and Ernest Daudet in *La Vénus de Gordes*, published in 1866. That same year, Zola adapted it in turn in *Un mariage d'amour* and made two significant changes: the cuckolded husband was drowned rather than shot, and the criminals were not caught but were punished by their own conscience (or in Zola's words, their nerves). However, this was not the end of the adaptation. Within the next year, he would rewrite the story again and rename it *Thérèse Raquin*, this time fleshing out the bare bones of the novella into a gripping

psychological thriller that attempts to marry positivist methodology with fiction. To this end, he would make striking revisions to his female protagonist. While *Un marriage d'amour* could be seen as an *ébauche* for *Thérèse Raquin*, the important accretions to the later novel clearly demonstrate Zola's emphasis on typologies and the deterministic nature of heredity to account for temperament and behaviour. In the early novella, the female protagonist, whom Zola originally named Suzanne, lacks all of the later Thérèse's racial history, and thus lacks much of the motivation assigned to Thérèse. The only physical description of her makes no mention of race: 'Suzanne, une jeune femme… d'une maigreur nerveuse, ni laide, ni belle, mais ayant dans son visage effilé deux grands beaux yeux qui allaient largement d'une tempe à l'autre.'[196] Similarly, when we are first introduced to Thérèse, there is no specific reference to race. This, however, is a sign of the duplicitous nature of her métisse identity rather than a simple absence of racial assignment.

> … On distinguait […] un profil pâle et grave de jeune femme. Ce profil sortait vaguement des ténèbres qui régnaient dans la boutique. Au front bas et sec s'attachait un nez long, étroit, effilé ; les lèvres étaient deux minces traits d'un rose pâle, et le menton, court et nerveux, tenait au cou par une ligne souple et grasse. On ne voyait pas le corps, qui se perdait dans l'ombre ; le profil seul apparaissait, d'une blancheur mate, troué d'un œil noir largement ouvert, et comme écrasé sous une épaisse chevelure sombre.[197]

Thérèse's physiognomy, to the extent that we can make it out, would probably have suggested to contemporary readers that she too is white. Her pale profile, long and slender nose and thin lips are all attributes in direct opposition to those most often cited to distinguish the black race. I use Georges Cuvier, the famous nineteenth-century biologist and racial taxonomist as the voice of contemporary, popular notions of race. His description of the black person focuses upon these

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[196] Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, Notes and Commentary by Maurice Le Blond (Paris: François Bernouard, 1928) 233.

[197] Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (Brodard et Taupin, 1975) 17. All further citations from the novel will be from this edition – cited as *TR* – unless otherwise stated.

very characteristics: 'son teint est noir, ses cheveux crépus, son crâne comprimé, son nez écrasé; son museau saillant et ses grosses lèvres la rapprochent manifestement des singes'.[198] The only suggestion that Thérèse may be racially mixed is the reference to a matte white complexion, often associated with *métissage*. We have already seen this reference applied in Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* to his métisse character Cecily, and in Moreau de Saint-Méry's observations of racial difference in Saint-Domingue. In the case of Sue and Zola, this lack of transparency signals the natural duplicity of the métisse. The subtle reference to *métissage* in the first portrait of Thérèse is presently substantiated when we learn that she is, indeed, the daughter of a North African woman and a Frenchman. Over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Thérèse's *sang africain*, the legacy of her mother, colours her identity and behaviour beneath a façade of whiteness.

Born in Oran, the child of a French captain and an Algerian woman, Thérèse has been raised by the captain's sister, Madame Raquin, in a petit bourgeois family, cut off completely from her maternal roots. Zola erases any Arab or North African racial or cultural specificity in his portrait of Thérèse; she is simply half African, and this heredity influences her behaviour: 'On m'a dit que ma mère était fille d'un chef de tribu en Afrique; j'ai souvent songé à elle, j'ai compris que je lui appartenais par le sang et les instincts'.[199] This determinist vision of heredity reveals an important incongruity: Thérèse's nature is purely a result of her mother; only the percentage of African blood in her plays any role in determining her true character. Not only do we see that coloured blood determines character but also that it is through the mother that inheritance seems to be determined. Race and

[198] Cuvier, 94-95. Cuvier was a major figure in nineteenth-century French zoology. Chair of anatomy of animals at the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle and secretary of Académie des Sciences, Cuvier can be seen as a powerful voice in French science during the century. See Anne Fausto-Sterling, 'Gender, Race, and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of the "Hottentot" Woman in Europe, 1815-1817', *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture,* ed. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 23-28.
[199] *TR*, 61.

gender are crucial in the determination of heredity. It is the coloured woman who corrupts her offspring with an animalistic and hypersexual legacy. The father's white blood is only important insofar as it is serves as a falsely serene and poised façade. She is accepted into this bourgeois world because she can pass sufficiently as white (not racially coloured). However, as Zola asserts through the voice of his heroine, this white façade is false; Thérèse has been forced to become a *menteuse*, to hide her essentially black temperament.[200] 'Thérèse, immobile, paisible comme les autres, regardait ces joies bourgeoises, ces affaissements souriants. Et, au fond d'elle, il y avait des rires sauvages; tout son être raillait, tandis que son visage gardait une rigidité froide.'[201] Beneath the cool exterior rages a suppressed savage nature that will inevitably surface and wreak havoc. Despite her ability to pass as white and thus reside in this petit bourgeois world, Thérèse lives at odds with her environment. The white façade is in conflict with her instinctual nature. Real racial mixture cannot occur for Zola; a *métisse* is really a coloured woman with the capacity to hide her blackness behind a false cloak of whiteness. The inevitable conflict between physiology (in this case, blood) and environment renders the *métisse* duplicitous. 'Ils m'ont rendue mauvaise. Ils ont fait de moi une hypocrite et une menteuse…Ils m'ont étouffée dans leur douceur bourgeoise, et je ne m'explique pas comment il y a encore du sang dans mes veines. […] Alors j'ai menti, j'ai menti toujours. Je suis restée là toute douce, toute silencieuse, rêvant de frapper et de mordre.'[202]

When Laurent stirs her so-far dormant sexuality, Thérèse is reborn in passion and her African instincts are rekindled.

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[200] My employment here of the term 'black' references the tri-racial model discussed in chapter three.

[201] *TR*, 72-3. Madame Raquin tells Laurent, 'Ne faites pas attention à la froideur de ma nièce. Je la connais; son visage paraît froid, mais son cœur est chaud de toutes les tendresses et de tous les dévouements', 86.

[202] Ibid. 62. The reference to striking and biting evokes a comparison between Thérèse and a wild animal. This comparison will be strengthened by the complicity between Thérèse and the household cat, which will be discussed at length later.

> …*Le sang de sa mère*, ce sang africain qui brûlait ses veines, se mit à couler, à battre furieusement dans son corps maigre, presque vierge encore. Elle s'étalait, s'offrait avec une impudeur souveraine.[203]

Her shamelessness is the result of her ancestry or blood. In the earlier novella, we are not given any insight into Suzanne's reasons for adultery. We are told only that, 'la femme devint peu à peu passionnément amoureuse'.[204] Suzanne's love is gradual whereas Thérèse is presented as an animal in heat that is in need of a lover. With the first kiss, a passion is ignited in Thérèse that transforms her into a new woman, unrecognisable to Laurent and potentially dangerous in her passion.

> Jamais Laurent n'avait connu une pareille femme. Il resta surpris, mal à l'aise. D'ordinaire, ses maîtresses ne le recevaient pas avec une telle fougue; il était accoutumé à des baisers froids et indifférents, à des amours lasses et rassasiées.[205]

The fiery sexuality of Thérèse is markedly absent in Zola's depiction of Suzanne. She seems rather like the women whom Laurent generally frequents, whose cold and indifferent kisses are all that one can expect from one's mistress. With no reference at all made to Suzanne's natural sexuality, she lacks motivation for her adulterous affair and for her subsequent wish to see her husband dead. Indeed, the affair and plans for the murder take up three sentences in the novella. In the later novel, Zola provides a much more detailed analysis of the commonality of the co-conspirators and the reasons for their descent into a self-induced hell that leads to suicide. In other words, what Zola tells us in the early novella is more fully explicated in the subsequent novel with recourse into racialist typology. Two major plot choices are introduced in the later novel: Thérèse's descent into the demimonde and her induced miscarriage, both of which will be addressed later. Thérèse's entry into prostitution is a direct result of her race and is foreshadowed

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[203] Ibid. 59. My emphasis.
[204] Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, Notes and Commentary by Maurice Le Blond, 233.
[205] *TR*, 59.

early in the novel when the narrative announces that, 'au premier baiser, elle se révéla courtisane.'[206] Thérèse's racial ancestry provides Zola with a physiological reason for her behaviour. Her intrinsic nature, when left to her own devices, is animalistic, particularly feline as we see in a passage describing Thérèse as a child: 'elle vécut intérieurement une existence brûlante et emportée. Quand elle était seule, dans l'herbe, au bord de l'eau, elle se couchait à plat ventre comme une bête, les yeux noirs et agrandis, le corps tordu, près de bondir.'[207] Zola expands this association between the female and the feline:

> …Elle mimait le chat, elle allongeait les mains en façon de griffes, elle donnait à ses épaules des ondulations félines. François [le chat], gardant une immobilité de pierre, la contemplait toujours; ses yeux seuls paraissaient vivants; et il y avait, dans les coins de sa gueule, deux plis profonds qui faisaient éclater de rire cette tête d'animal empaillé.[208]

In this passage, there is complicity between woman and animal; the cat seems to enjoy the performance while maintaining a stony visage that is not dissimilar from that of Thérèse when she is forced to participate in the Thursday evening reception of guests or sit at the dinner table surrounded by her husband, aunt, and lover. Both creatures possess some primal, instinctual savagery that remains hidden beneath a cold, inflexible exterior. For Thérèse, this exterior is only breached after her sexual initiation, and even then she is able to maintain it most of the time through force of will, thus suggesting that while her savage sexuality is innate, so too is her ability to dissimulate. After the murder of Camille, there is a period of time in which Thérèse cultivates a 'sainte-nitouche' repentant character that is at odds with her earlier displayed bestial instincts. I would argue that this further demonstrates her duplicity. Her subsequent move into prostitution is presented as more in keeping with her natural character.

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[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid. 26.
[208] Ibid. 67.

The erotic element in Thérèse's animalistic sexuality seduces Laurent but at the same time frightens him: 'Laurent se sentait froid aux os […] En réalité il avait peur. Sa maîtresse ne le possédait pas encore entièrement; il restait au fond de lui un peu de ce malaise qu'il avait éprouvé sous les premiers baisers de la jeune femme'.[209] This reminds us of Jean's similar oscillation between desire for and disgust/fear of Cora, which suggests a *natural* disinclination that both Laurent and Jean overcome in accordance with Gobineau's model of interracial relations. The feline Thérèse is dangerous; she has proved herself to be wanton and primitive. Her transformation from indifferent to insatiable is terrifying. The placid, insipid mask is torn off to reveal a sexual monster whose ferocity catches her male partner unawares. In this instance we are not far away from Cora's unmasking. The truth of both women is the bestial, sexually-insatiable blackness beneath the white mask.

> On eût dit que sa figure venait d'éclairer en dedans, que des flammes s'échappaient de sa chair. Et, autour d'elle, son sang qui brûlait, ses nerfs qui se tendaient, jetaient ainsi des effluves chauds, un air pénétrant et âcre. / Au premier baiser, elle se révéla courtisane.[210]

The repetition of the image of flames and burning ('elle vécut intérieurement une existence brûlante', 'son sang qui brûlait') evokes a demonic element in the character of Thérèse that is reminiscent of the exotic woman in Baudelaire's poem, 'Sed non satiata', in which the woman is compared to a bizarre deity whose intoxicating force bewitches the hapless male speaker. In a series of approximations, she is likened to wine, opium, and other intoxicants. She is a source of sensual stimulation and also pitiless demon, whose sexual appetite frightens and excites the speaker.

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[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid. 59. My emphasis.

O démon sans pitié ! verse-moi moins de flamme[211]

The image of the flame can refer to desire and/or hell. It is this dualism, this tightly woven relationship between attraction and danger that is a prominent theme in all of the texts we have thus far encountered that depict the erotic relationship between white man and coloured woman. Furthermore, we see in the poem the speaker's fear of emasculation, his fear to be rendered the Persephone to his lover's Pluto, which results from her sexual supremacy and from his inability to satisfy her. The effeminised transformation of Laurent at the end of Zola's novel narrativises the fear articulated by Baudelaire's speaker.

> Hélas ! et je ne puis, Mégère libertine,
> Pour briser ton courage et te mettre aux abois,
> Dans l'enfer de ton lit devenir Proserpine.[212]

T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting sums up the character of Thérèse perfectly:

> Thérèse masquerades as a respectable woman. This bourgeois charade has virtually suffocated her, choked the vitality out of her. The awakening of her black blood leads Thérèse to commit transgressions that are uncharacteristic of the nineteenth-century bourgeois woman: murder, abortion, and, finally, prostitution. She reveals herself to be a courtesan and Laurent calls her a *prostituée*, for it is her corrupting sex that seduced him to murder Camille.[213]

Thérèse's actions are locked into her heredity. We, as readers, are hardly surprised when we learn near the end of the novel of Thérèse's forays into the demimonde.[214] Sexual ferocity is a matter of blood and gender. Colette Becker

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[211] Baudelaire, 'Sed non satiata', *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ed. Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin (Paris: Librarie José Corti, 1942) 29.
[212] Ibid.
[213] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 84.
[214] '…Il [Laurent] remarqua qu'elle s'habillait comme une fille, avec une robe à longue traîne ; elle se dandinait sur le trottoir d'une façon provocante, regardant les hommes, relevant si haut le devant

argues that by giving Thérèse an African heritage, Zola imposes a vision of 'la femme-instinct, dominée par les nerfs, toujours sujette à des crises qui couvent. La femme est inquiétante, dangereuse'.[215] I would suggest rather that it is Thérèse's identity as a *métisse* that defines her temperament and behaviour. As such, she is a person turned in against herself, against her surroundings; she can be no other way. Duplicity and hysteric sensibility result from the clash between environment and instinct, between racial poles. And while she may appear white and benign when we first meet her, once sexually awakened, she becomes a Messaline. A *femme fatale*, Thérèse infects and destroys her male partner by the power of 'the invisibility of her racial malady'.[216]

My contention is that in Zola's effort to fictionally represent human specimens whose physiology controls their behaviour, he turns to one of the most common fictions of all – race. Thérèse's heredity is at the heart of her character: it explains her duplicity, her sexual excess, her nervous condition, and her descent into prostitution. In one of his first attempts to write a Naturalist novel that exploits positivist theory, Zola uses contemporary racial typology and degeneration theory to explain behaviour and personality.

The Fiction of Type in the Naturalist Narrative

In the preface to the second edition of *Thérèse Raquin* in 1869, Zola outlines the methodology that he employs in the novel.

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de sa jupe en la prenant à poignée, qu'elle montrait tout le devant de ses jambes, ses bottines lacées et ses bas blancs. […] …Thérèse se dirigea vers un café […] Elle s'assit au milieu d'un groupe de femmes […] Deux filles vinrent se pencher sur la table qu'elle occupait, et se mirent à la tutoyer de leur voix enrouée. […] Lorsque Thérèse eut achevé son absinthe, elle se leva, prit le bras du jeune homme blond et descendit la rue. […] Puis il [Laurent] crut distinguer les mains du jeune homme blond qui se glissaient autour de la taille de Thérèse.' *TR*, 300-301.

[215] Colette Becker, *Les apprentissages de Zola: du poète romantique au romancier naturaliste, 1840-1867* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1993) 362.

[216] Kenan Malik uses this phrase to describe Nana's degenerative nature but I find that the remark is also particularly apt for Thérèse, 111. Here we are likewise reminded of the invisible – and therefore terrifying – nature of degeneracy, as discussed in chapter three.

> En un mot, je n'ai eu qu'un désir: étant donné un homme puissant et une femme inassouvie, chercher en eux la bête, ne voir même que la bête, les jeter dans un drame violent, et noter scrupuleusement les sensations et les actes de ces êtres. J'ai simplement fait sur ces deux corps vivants le travail analytique que les chirurgiens font sur des cadavres.[217]

The two protagonists are subjects of an experiment; both represent types of humanity who are similarly 'souverainement dominés par leurs nerfs et leur sang, dépourvus de libre arbitre, entraînés à chaque acte de leur vie par les fatalités de leur chair'.[218] In this 'pathography' – to borrow a neologism from Emily Apter that refers to the 1860s vogue of blending biography, fiction, and clinical case study – the two protagonists are controlled by their blood and the lure of the flesh; devoid of a spiritual component, they are beasts, nothing more.[219] In their union, we see the primitive and sexual joining of the lower class with the racialised Other. 'Thérèse et Laurent sont des brutes humaines, rien de plus. J'ai cherché à suivre pas à pas dans ces brutes le travail sourd des passions, les poussés de l'instinct, les détraquements cérébraux survenus à la suite d'une crise nerveuse.'[220]

So, in the name of dispassionate scientific observation of human behaviour, Zola sets out to examine two types of dispositions, that of the powerful man and the insatiable woman. To exemplify these types, Zola chooses Laurent, a brutish, manly 'fils de paysan'[221] and Thérèse, a *métisse*. Characters are trapped by their

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[217] *TR*, 7.
[218] Ibid. 6.
[219] Emily Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), xi-xiii.
[220] *TR*, 6.
[221] Ibid. 45. Laurent works for the same administration as Camille and has attended secondary school, thus he cannot be strictly categorised as a peasant. His profession is described as a 'métier d'employé'. Ibid. 48. Nevertheless, his inherited, deeper self, which is described as that of a true son of a peasant (and which is similarly hidden under a petit bourgeois veneer) is positioned at the lower ranks of the social hierarchy. 'Laurent était un vrai fils de paysan, d'allure un peu lourde, le dos bombé, les mouvements lents et précis, l'air tranquille et entêté.' 'Au fond, c'était un paresseux, ayant des appétits sanguins, des désirs très arrêtés de jouissances faciles et durables. Ce

physiology, their environment, and their heredity: Thérèse's pathology, in the form of hyper sexuality, brutishness, and neurotic sensibility, is explained by her racial mixture, which places her at odds with her (white) petit bourgeois environment. Her background (physiology, heredity, and environment) provides 'motive' for her behaviour. Similarly, Laurent's lower class status 'explains' his rough, loutish disposition that translates into violence and murder.

Race and class – in this case the commonality between black and plebeian – reinforce each other in their deviation from the purity of the white, bourgeois norm and thus produce particularly violent and unproductive sex. As the affair progresses, there is a psychic connection forged between the lovers: they share the same thoughts, fears, guilt and hatred. The latent bestiality of the racially-mixed Thérèse is attracted to the brutish manliness of Laurent's peasant stock.[222] After the murder of Camille, a quasi-familial link is formed between the two conspirators: '*Une parenté de sang* et de volupté s'était établie entre eux'.[223] This collusion, and indeed, the initial attraction between the two characters are both founded upon a commonality of character, and a kind of blood tie. 'Il semblait à Laurent et à Thérèse que le sang de l'un allait dans la poitrine de l'autre en passant par leurs poings unis.'[224]

Colette Becker suggests that Laurent's physical and moral characteristics are remarkably similar to those that will be defined later in 1887 by Césare Lombroso in his portrait of a 'criminel-né' – such as his large hands, square fingers, thick neck, abundant hair, laziness, cowardliness, insensibility and lack of remorse.[225] Similarly, Thérèse exhibits characteristics that will eventually become associated

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grand corps puissant ne demandait qu'à ne rien faire, qu'à se vautrer dans une oisiveté et un assouvissement de toutes les heures.' Ibid. 45 and 47.

[222] 'La nature sanguine de ce garçon, sa voix pleine, ses rires gras, les senteurs âcres et puissantes qui s'échappaient de sa personne, troublaient la jeune femme et la jetaient dans une sorte d'angoisse nerveuse.' Ibid. 50.

[223] Ibid. 157-58. My emphasis.

[224] Ibid. 114.

[225] Becker, 344.

with the natural-born female criminal: thin lips, abundant black hair, a strong jaw, a short, imperceptible forehead, a rather virile beauty, excessive eroticism, and cruelty.[226] Not only has Zola created two brutish characters, but also he has chosen to present them in terms that by the end of the century (if not earlier) were identifiable as criminal and savage, for, as Lombroso further claims in *L'Homme criminel*, 'la différence est bien petite, quelquefois nulle, entre le criminel, l'homme du peuple sans éducation et le sauvage'.[227]

In this sense, both Thérèse and Laurent are similarly outside of respectable and normative bourgeois society, linked by shared blood. Any sex between them is bound to be a site of conflict, degeneration, and death. After the murder of Camille, their attempts at sex are sadomasochistic and vicious. To assuage the inner remorse, terror, and rage that course through them, they give and receive physical pain and are rewarded with nothing but anguish and revulsion. Claude Schumacher describes the sexual intercourse of Thérèse and Laurent as 'the cruel wrestling of two enemies trying to inflict wounds on one another, not in order to hurt but to find a release from their own unbearable tensions'.[228] Their last effort occurs a few days after their wedding, when Laurent finally 'prit brusquement Thérèse entre ses bras […] et la tira à lui avec violence'.[229] At the moment of orgasm, both are pierced with an acute, violent pain that breaks them, reduces them to sobbing wretchedness. Aware now that only suffering can come from their sexual relationship, hereafter, it degenerates into raw brutality from which both find some peace.

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[226] Lombroso, *La Femme criminelle et la prostituée*, trans. Louise Meille (Paris: Alcan, 1896) 679. Cited in Becker, 361. See also 'Sur les femmes criminelles' in *L'Homme criminel, criminel-né, fou moral, épileptique. Etude anthropologique et medico-légale*, 255-241.

[227] César Lombroso, *L'Homme criminel, criminel-né, fou moral, épileptique. Etude anthropologique et médico-légale*, trans. Régnier and Bourneit (Paris: Alcan, 1887) 666.

[228] Claude Schumacher, *Zola: 'Thérèse Raquin'* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1990) 49.

[229] *TR*, 214.

> Et Laurent […] la secouait avec rage, la battait, meurtrissait son corps de son poing fermé. A deux reprises, il faillit l'étrangler. Thérèse mollissait sous les coups; elle goûtait une volupté âpre à être frappée; elle s'abandonnait, elle s'offrait, elle provoquait son mari pour qu'il l'assommât davantage. C'était encore là un remède contre les souffrances de sa vie; elle dormait mieux la nuit, quand elle avait été bien battue le soir.[230]

Finally, when they can stand no more, both Laurent and Thérèse simultaneously plot the murder of the other, underlining to what extent the two share a kind of telepathic hypersensitivity, a result – no doubt – of their mutual *détraquement*. In the end, they decide instead upon a double suicide.

If the preface to the second edition of *Thérèse Raquin* is to be taken at face value, the novel is meant to function as a case study of human temperaments; the effect of heredity, physiology, and environment upon two carefully selected human beasts.[231] The 'science' that Zola invokes as the organising principle of his novel seems to hearken back to Georges Cuvier's biological naturalism with its similar conception of invariable human typologies. Moreover, by demonstrating the sanguine and psychic links between a lower class European man and a coloured woman, Zola seems to reiterate Gobineau's hierarchy. For Gobineau, these figures of alterity threaten the health of the social body through degenerative sexuality. Zola follows this model when he makes their deviant (excessive) sexuality pathological and ultimately lethal.

George Mosse's study of the powerful relationship between nationalism and sexuality in the nineteenth century hinges upon the concept of manliness, essential

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[230] Ibid. 283.

[231] In this way, Zola makes use of the tools put forth by Hippolyte Taine, an influential contemporary critic who argues in his 1863 *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* that to appreciate a national culture or an individual artistic work, one must first examine the major formative influences: 'la race, le milieu, le moment'. According to Taine, scientific methodology proffers the tools to measure the biological and environmental factors that affect human behaviour. Artists and their creations are thought to be determined by their milieu and their époque. Art, in this positivist frame, is regarded as the productive culmination of a specific era and environment.

to the self-definition of both bourgeois society and national ideology. Manliness meant freedom from sexual passions and a sublimation of sensuality for the greater good of the society and nation.[232] Sexual intoxication or excess demonstrated an unmanly and antisocial persuasion in an individual. As the famous sexologist, Kraft-Ebing writes at the end of the century, if a normally constituted civilised being is not capable of mastering his sexual urges when they come into conflict with the demands of society, then family and state, the foundation of legal and moral order, will cease to exist.[233] Control of sexuality was not just an indicator of personal respectability and manliness, but also a civic duty. Certainly, in Gobineau's essay, interracial sex is presented as the noble and necessary – although ultimately tragic – duty of the civilising white race if it is to create nations. Sexual degenerates were those who could not channel their sexuality in socially 'respectable' ways. 'Nationalism determined the sexual practices that were nation building and race affirming, marking unproductive eroticism as not only immoral but unpatriotic.'[234] Both Laurent and Thérèse are inferior figures of alterity whose dangerous lust threatens not only their individual bodies but also the social body at large. Furthermore, the characteristics assigned to their 'outsider' status at the same time menace society and confirm its standard of behaviour.[235]

At the heart of all of this is lethal sexuality. As Michel Foucault argues, sexuality becomes the central structuring feature of a vast theoretical edifice meant to preserve the health and longevity of the ruling bourgeoisie through the regulation of the individual and social body.[236] Bourgeois bodies must maintain their health (their purity) through healthy, normal and productive sex. Sexuality that deviates from this normative stricture is not simply seen as different but as pathological. As

[232] Mosse, 13.
[233] Cited by Mosse, 11.
[234] Stoler, 135.
[235] Mosse, 133.
[236] See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: la volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

Sander Gilman suggests, it is in the nineteenth century that the discourse of sexuality provides a vocabulary that allows difference to be recast as pathology.[237]

Deviant Sexuality and the (Coloured) Courtesan

Thérèse's dangerous sexuality is at the foundation of the novel. Zola's narrative voice functions as a warning against fundamentally destructive libidinal satisfaction divorced from 'natural' procreative purpose. According to Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, author of an important study of the representation of women in Zola's oeuvre, fecundity is highly valorised in Zola's world. Woman, through childbirth, is washed of the original sin of her sexuality. As Brian Nelson notes, all of Zola's ideal heroines are or become bourgeois women. Their role as an ideal feminine type reflects conventional, bourgeois values like hard work, order, moderation, sobriety, and uprightness.[238] All of the women who fit this model are mother figures whose sexuality is appropriately directed toward reproduction. One of the primary theses in Zola's *Fécondité* is that producing children is a civic duty to combat France's declining birth rate: sex has a social purpose. 'The bourgeois ethic of moderation informs Zola's attitude toward sexuality in the sense that, throughout his work, he contrasts the desirability of moderation with the destructiveness of uncontrolled sexual passion.'[239] Only a pure woman can engage in fruitful sexual activity; an impure woman is either unable to conceive or her conception produces further suffering.[240] Thérèse's induced miscarriage provides an example of the repercussions of 'unnatural' sex:

> La pensée d'avoir un enfant de Laurent lui paraissait monstrueuse, sans qu'elle s'expliquât pourquoi. […] A tout prix,

[237] Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985) 3.
[238] Brian Nelson, *Zola and the Bourgeoisie: A Study of Themes and Techniques in Les Rougon-Macquart* (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1983) 54.
[239] Ibid. 55.
[240] Hubertine in *Rêve* also has a miscarriage; in *Madeleine Ferat* and *Nana*, the child dies of smallpox; in *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* and *La Terre*, the fetus dies with the mother.

> elle voulut débarrasser son sein de cet enfant qui la glaçait et qu'elle ne pouvait porter davantage. Elle ne dit rien à son mari, et, un jour, après l'avoir cruellement provoqué, comme il levait le pied contre elle, elle présenta le ventre. Elle se laissa frapper ainsi à en mourir. Le lendemain, elle faisait une fausse couche.[241]

Bertrand-Jennings argues convincingly that for Zola, the female character, *as an object of desire*, is almost exclusively an instrument of sin.[242] Untamed and uncontrollable, she functions not simply as an object of masculine desire but also as a dangerous symbol of alterity. Her otherness threatens her lover because, protean, she can remain unknowable to him, and therefore, outside of his dominion. 'Autre absolu, puisque l'homme ne l'a pas "connue" et n'a donc pu neutraliser le danger qu'elle recèle de par son altérité et son sexe, énigme menaçante pour la simple raison qu'elle n'est pas Moi.'[243] Bertrand-Jennings goes on to suggest that:

> Principes du mal et de la mort quand elles sont perçues dans leur fonction sexuelle, les femmes le sont aussi presque toujours quand leur sexualité est moins évidente, et ce sont elles qui, de toute façon, représentent le mal particulier que le texte dénonce. […] Dans le cycle de la femme et de l'amour que constituent les cinq premiers romans zoliens, la femme…représente toujours la lubricité éhontée dans toute son horreur, et fait ses victimes des hommes qui l'approchent.[244]

While women for Zola might all possess an 'evil' essence that is directly linked to their gender and their toxic sexuality, there is no better representative of woman as a sinful object of desire than the *métisse*, Thérèse whose latent bestial sexuality destroys not only her husband and her lover, but also herself. Moreover, her innate

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[241] *TR*, 290-291.
[242] Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, *L'éros et la femme chez Zola: de la chute au paradis retrouvé* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1977) 37.
[243] Ibid. 38. Her use of 'Moi' refers to the masculine principle whose opposing feminine principle is termed, 'Autre.' This conception of Zola's Woman as Other and unknowable is similarly suggested by Naomi Schor who argues that 'for Zola, just as for Freud, woman is a "dark continent" far more disturbing than the African continent blithely colonized in *Fécondité*'. *Breaking the Chain. Woman, Theory, and French Realist Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 29-47.
[244] Bertrand-Jennings, 72-3.

duplicity affords her a shifting and mutable persona (from sainte-nitouche to Messaline) that confuses and terrifies Laurent, who one could imagine at times echoing Jacques Ferrand when he cried, 'Quelle était cette femme?' Further, her animalistic wantonness is, as Zola informs us, a function of her racial background and provides Zola with a neat way to introduce the lethal nature of sexuality. Sex and death are, for all intents and purposes, synonymous in this novel: the ghost of Camille plays an important role in explicitly articulating the theme of death as intimately associated with sex. Nestled in between them on their bed is the glassy cadaver of the ghostly Camille.[245] Death lingers on the lips of lovers, it follows them to bed, and it becomes the only possible escape from their self-made hell. This representation of cruel and impure degenerative sex cannot be fruitful in Zola. Fecundity would be a means of valorising or legitimating that which has only been depicted as infernal. When Thérèse realises that she is pregnant, she comprehends the monstrosity of such a birth and helps to induce a miscarriage by being a compliant victim to her husband's abuses. Death – not birth – is linked with sex in *Thérèse Raquin*.

The other female character that reaches the same nadir of destructive and degenerative sexuality is another of Zola's eponymous heroines – Nana. In *Thérèse Raquin* and *Nana*, we find women whose unbridled sexuality is a function of their outsider status vis-à-vis respectable bourgeois society. Thérèse, as a *métisse*, is an illegitimate member of the petit bourgeoisie; we learn that despite her *embourgeoisement*, her character and instincts have been inherited solely from her African mother and are at odds with her environment. Here is the split personality of a woman whose race is at odds with her milieu and thus produces in her a nervous crisis when her dormant passion is awakened in adultery. While Thérèse may appear physiognomically European, she is inescapably coloured and thus unable to shake off the stereotypes associated with that colour: hyper sexuality and brutish animalism. In comparison, Nana is a prostitute and member of the

[245] Ibid. 210.

demimonde who, through her sexual wiles and depravity, climbs into the higher ranks of society to become the social queen of Paris. Her *embourgeoisement* is similarly unfounded and perverse. Both women are depicted as pernicious internal enemies of the established social order and both could be viewed as degenerate according to the definition given by Morel as the deviation from the normal, original type. Both Nana and Thérèse deviate from the ideal bourgeois woman whose sexuality is channelled toward reproduction. Thérèse has inherited her courtesan status through racial pedigree, and in the case of Nana, through ancestral alcoholism and insanity. Their diseased moral faculties and their nervous temperament (especially true of Thérèse) attest to their degeneracy. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, both women bring the ruin of their male partners. In Nana's case, she encapsulates the ruin of an entire society. 'Nana elle-même devenait une force de la nature, un ferment de destruction […] corrompant et désorganisant Paris entre ses cuisses de neige; le faisait tourner, comme les femmes, chaque mois font tourner le lait.'[246] Inscribed upon the bodies of these women are the ravages of heredity, environment and instinct all of which have contributed to the degenerative nature of both. More importantly, these women are catalysts for the degeneration of others.

Numerous critics have addressed the links made between the coloured woman and the prostitute in nineteenth-century discourses of sexuality. Sander Gilman in his seminal work, *Difference and Pathology*, argues that in the nineteenth century, black female sexuality is tied to the iconography of the prostitute.[247] Sexually rapacious and infectious, the prostitute as an icon of uncontrollable and dangerous sexuality is remarkably similar to the portrait painted of the coloured woman. Indeed by the end of the century, Césare Lombroso in his 1893 *La femme*

[246] Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Brodard et Taupin, 1955) 201.
[247] Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press). We have seen already the courtesan characteristics in the portraits of Cecily and Cora. Indeed, the simple display of their bodies could be seen to constitute a form of prostitution.

criminelle et la prostituée suggests that the prostitute's labia is a throwback to the Hottentot, if not the chimpanzee. 'In short she is an atavistic subclass of woman. His text, in its offhand use of the analogy between the Hottentot and the prostitute, simply articulates in images a view that had been present throughout the late nineteenth century.'[248]

Both the prostitute and the coloured woman are supposed to manifest their deviant social behaviour in the materiality of their bodies. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla refer to this phenomenon as 'embodied deviance' by which they mean 'the scientific and popular postulate that the bodies of subjects classified as deviant are essentially marked in some recognisable fashion'.[249] We find that both the coloured woman and the prostitute are depicted as bestial; their uninhibited and destructive sexuality best represented through references to animals.[250] Brutish and carnal, Thérèse and Nana overpower their male lovers, effeminise them – Laurent and George Hugon in particular – and in the end destroy them. We have already noted the close relationship between Thérèse and François, the household cat. Similarly, Nana is 'toute velue […] tandis que, dans sa croupe et ses cuisses de

[248] Sander Gilman, 'Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration: From a Theory of Race to a Race of Theory,' 98. Despite the popular opinion that connected black women and prostitutes as similarly sexualised women, this opinion was not supported by any evidence. According to Parent-Duchatelet's records of the 12,707 registered prostitutes in Paris, only eleven were African. See Parent-Duchatelet, A.-J.-B., *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris considéré sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale, et de l'administration*, tome one (Paris: Baillière, 1837) 41.

[249] Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, ed. 'Introduction', *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, 1-18 (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 2.

[250] This metaphoric convergence of woman and animal – particularly the cat – recalls Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863), in which the white female nude reclines on her couch, her black female attendant brings her a bouquet of flowers, and on the bed is an arching black cat. The pun homonym 'chatte' references the proffered sexuality of the nude Olympia. Similarly, the black attendant is often read as the 'vehicle needed for the (re) productive performance of "white" sexuality'. See Jennifer Devere Brody, 'Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's *Olympia*' in *Theatre Journal*, 53.1 (2001): 95-118, 102. Sharpley-Whiting suggests a similarity between Manet's portraiture of *Olympia* and Zola's of Thérèse. 'Within Thérèse's body, Zola has fused the light and darkness, the "realities", of all three of the painting's creatures – a white body (Olympia) governed by the "lascivious sensuality of the blacks that flows in its veins (the black female servant) and animality (the famous cat)', 79.

cavale, dans les renflements charnus creusés de plis plus profonds, qui donnaient au sexe le voile troublant de leur ombre, il y avait de la bête'.[251]

Nancy Stepan refers to Eugene Talbot's 1898 *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs and Results* which argues that 'prostitutes were like a race, showing arrested development, morbid heredity, and stigmata of physical and mental kinds, such as skull deformities'.[252] Similarly, George Mosse suggests an interaction on the level of metaphor between 'inferior races' and sexual degenerates in nineteenth-century discourses of sexuality: 'the stereotyped depiction of sexual degenerates was transferred almost intact to "inferior races" who inspired the same fear. […] Blacks and Jews were both endowed with excessive sexuality, with a so-called female sensuousness that transformed love into lust'.[253] Not only do sexual degenerates and lower races share an overactive libido, but also this libido is strikingly feminine in nature. Here we have echoes of Gobineau and Eichtal's metaphoric pairing of the female gender and the black race. The prostitute and the coloured woman (who possesses courtesan tendencies) both function as warnings that degenerative sexuality harms not only the individual but also the society at large. The social body becomes an entity at risk, threatened by the disease of crime, prostitution, and racial mixture; simultaneously, the bodies of the criminal, the prostitute, and the *métisse* are a 'sign and "embodiment" of social dangerousness and deviations from statistical norms'.[254]

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[251] Zola, *Nana*, 202. See Kari Weil's article 'Purebreds and Amazons: Saying Things with Horses in Late-Nineteenth-Century France' in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.1 (1999): 1-37. Weil suggests that the horse functions as a 'transitional object' not only in discourses of aesthetics, but also in discourses of gender, race, and sexuality (or breeding) in nineteenth-century French society. Weil argues that in *Nana*, 'horse culture provides a[n]…identification among modernity, female desire, and the degeneration of the French race', p. 3. 'Throughout the novel, an identification between women and horses functions along with other animal metaphors to expose the particularly bestial nature of the courtesan,' 23-4.

[252] Stepan, 'Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science', 20.

[253] Mosse, 36.

[254] David G. Horn, 'The Norm Which is Not One: Reading the Female Body in Lombroso's Anthropology', *Deviant Bodies*, 110.

'Embodied deviance' is not necessarily easy to identify, however. Lombroso writes that even the apparently beautiful prostitute conceals underlying signs of degeneracy such as atavistic genitals and facial signs that are covered over by a mask of makeup. Only the penetrating gaze of a scientist can see beneath the false seductive exterior to the anomalous degenerate beneath. [255]

> [W]hen youth vanishes, the jaws, the cheek-bones, hidden by adipose tissues, emerge, salient angles stand out, and the face grows virile, uglier than a man's; wrinkles deepen into the likeness of scars, and the countenance, once attractive, exhibits the full degenerate type which early grace had concealed.[256]

David Horn recognises the same dilemma with regard to unmasking the prostitute that we have noted in the recognition of the *métisse* – namely the impenetrability of the deceptive female body that tends to subvert even expert gazes.[257] In both cases, the attempts to create a 'transparent pathology' of the prostitute and the *métisse* instead further undermine the assertion of clear boundaries between 'pathological' and 'normal'.[258] In chapter one, we examined the fundamental inscrutability of the *métisse* who is defined as possessing invisible physical traits of difference. This hysterical assertion of difference in the face of sameness, the emphasis on the pathological as visibly distinct – though potentially hidden or

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[255] Ibid. 119-20.

[256] Horn cites Lombroso's 1895 *The Female Offender*, ed. W. Douglas Morrison (London: T. Fisher Unwin) 102.

[257] See Pascale Krumm's article, 'Nana maternelle: oxymore?' in *The French Review*, vol. 69, no. 2 (December 1995): 217-228 in which the author explores the question of fatal maternity in *Nana*. Of particular interest is his observation that Nana's body is simultaneously and paradoxically 'voilé et dévoilé' in the text, suggesting her body, while seemingly transparent, is actually elusive and double. A walking contradiction, she is mother and lover, maternal and sexual, dominated and dominant, passive and active, populist and aristocratic, heterosexual and homosexual, hidden and exposed, Venus and Messaline, and finally Eros and Thanatos. 'Bref, Nana incarne la Femme, figure antithétique et paradoxale par définition…' 217. Here we are reminded of Bertrand-Jennings's assertion that in Zola, Woman in her protean form is dangerous to man because he can never really 'know' her. Kari Weil suggests that because in these texts, 'the "nature" of women's sex is impossible to see, impossible to know' the male 'effort to uncover difference is…engulfed and consumed by desire for and repulsion by [the feminine]. One can see this in Zola's persistent metaphors linking women and animals which belie…the naturalist's claim to scientific observation', Weil, 23.

[258] Horn, 110.

masked – from normal, demonstrates the grudging acknowledgement of the limits of positivism even within vociferous acclamations of its power to name and differentiate. Zola, a vocal supporter of positivism – particularly in the realm of the novel – uses the characters of Thérèse and Nana to demonstrate not simply the degeneracy at work in contemporary society but also the danger of allowing into the ranks of the respectable bourgeoisie two women whose pathological sexuality – if little else visibly – signals their dangerous alterity. Both heroines die at the end of the novels: there can be no sustained *embourgeoisement* of such a perverse and threatening nature.

However, there are important differences between *Thérèse Raquin* and *Nana*. The latter heroine functions primarily as the destroyer of the ruling class. The novel is a social critique of the Second Empire and its corruption, which is embodied in the figure of the sexually corrupt Nana. Whereas the epic *Nana* sweeps from the glittering salons of the aristocracy to the grotty backrooms of the theatre in its expansive examination of the various class constellations within the Parisian universe, *Thérèse Raquin* remains more stationary and claustrophobic within the confines of the haberdashery shop. When it does leave the shop, the narrative eye remains firmly fixed upon the small cast of characters in their small world. The limited setting in *Thérèse Raquin* reflects the experimental nature of the novel as laid out by the author. By limiting the sphere of action, the novelist-scientist can better observe and analyse the behaviour of his characters. *Thérèse Raquin* is not a social critique but rather an experiment in narrative form. By studying Thérèse as a *brute humaine*, Zola demonstrates the powerful function of race in the delimitation of normalcy and pathology. Racial typology provides a mechanism with which Zola can delve into questions of difference and deviance. By grounding this typology within the triangulation of race-class-gender, Zola defines a bourgeois identity through an articulation of its inverse, what it is *not*. Mosse, Gilman, Stoler and others have argued that the bourgeois identity is dependent to a large extent upon white endogamy, upon clearly delineated sexual boundaries that maintain

class, race, and national purity. The *métisse* – as a natural prostitute – threatens the health and purity of the race, which is simultaneously linked to nation, class, and culture.

Decadent Transformation

Even though infernal sex will lead both lovers to suicide, sex's degenerative properties create a more noticeable decline in Laurent. As we have already noted, Thérèse's nervous breakdown is a hereditarily determined fact rather than the consequence of purely environmental contingencies. Her turn to prostitution at the end of the novel has already been predicted in her first kiss; her mixed race has produced a personality at war with itself. The affair with Laurent and the murder of Camille heighten hysterical elements that are already components of her personality. Not so for Laurent. His decline from brutish masculinity to hysteric effeminacy can be blamed entirely upon his malignant relationship with Thérèse.

> Avant de connaître Thérèse, Laurent avait la lourdeur, le calme prudent, la vie sanguine d'un fils de paysan. Il dormait, mangeait, buvait en brute. A toute heure, dans tous les faits de l'existence journalière, il respirait d'un souffle large et épais, content de lui, un peu abêti par sa graisse. A peine, au fond de sa chair alourdie, sentait-il parfois des chatouillements. C'étaient ces chatouillements que Thérèse avait développés en horribles secousses. […] Une existence nerveuse, poignante et nouvelle pour lui, lui fut brusquement révélée, aux premiers baisers de sa maîtresse. Cette existence décupla ses voluptés, donna un caractère si aigu à ses joies, qu'il en fut d'abord comme affolé; il s'abandonna éperdument à ces crises d'ivresse que jamais son sang ne lui avait procurées.[259]

The nervous disposition that Thérèse introduces alters Laurent physically as well as temperamentally. When we first encounter Laurent, we are told that he is a brute of a man, his thick neck a sign of his virility. The end of the novel transforms him

[259] *TR*, 204-205.

into a 'pretty boy'. A painter colleague comments upon his remarkable change. 'Et il considérait Laurent, dont la voix lui semblait plus douce, dont chaque geste avait une sorte d'élégance. Il ne pouvait deviner l'effroyable secousse qui avait changé cet homme, en développant en lui des nerfs de femme, des sensations aiguës et délicates.'[260] Tormented by the memory of Camille's murder and his current cruel and violent marriage, Laurent is transformed from brute to dandy, from 'ignoble maçon' to promising artist.[261] This novel could be seen as a case study of degenerative transformation, the metamorphosis of a sanguine temperament when it comes into contact with a nervous disposition, as Colette Becker suggests.[262] She further argues that Laurent's transformation demonstrates a popular contemporary medical theory that genius is born out of a major temperamental upheaval. 'Son détraquement est identique à celui de la société contemporaine, qui donne naissance à "des œuvres de belles brutes florissantes ou de fous de génie."'[263] In Laurent's metamorphosis, Zola pathologises decadence: the deterioration of virile masculinity into neurosis seems to account for Laurent's decadent dandyism and artistic potential. Laurent takes on the characteristics of Thérèse, in particular, her high-strung nerves and her femininity. Masculinity is lost and replaced with an effeminate sensibility that has a paradoxical effect upon Laurent: he has turned from a 'garçon épais et commun' into 'un joli garçon…avec des allures distinguées'. Laurent now, an artist and *flâneur*, has become a truly modern man. His painter friend remarks, 'Mais tu deviens joli garçon […] tu as une tenue d'ambassadeur. C'est du dernier chic'.[264] Not only does Laurent fit the appropriate profile of the modern artist, according to his friend, he actually has turned into a good artist. His paintings have a true energy and demonstrate a talent that did not previously exist. In other words, while he descends physically and mentally to the level of Thérèse, Laurent simultaneously gains a refinement and aesthetic

[260] Ibid. 235.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Becker, 341.
[263] Ibid. 331.
[264] Ibid. 234.

sensibility that seem to define him as the modern artist-dandy. The nervous delirium brought on by his association with Thérèse produces a kind of artistic genius that hitherto he did not possess.

> Laurent était peut-être devenu artiste comme il était devenu peureux, à la suite du grand détraquement qui avait bouleversé sa chair et son esprit. […] Dans la vie de terreur qu'il menait, sa pensée délirait et montait jusqu'à l'extase du génie; la maladie en quelque sorte morale, la névrose dont tout son être était secoué, développait en lui un sens artistique d'une lucidité étrange; depuis qu'il avait tué, sa chair s'était comme allégée, son cerveau éperdu lui semblait immense, et, dans ce brusque agrandissement de sa pensée, il voyait passer des créatures exquises, des rêveries de poète.[265]

Laurent's mental deterioration, both corrupting and creative, makes him a worthy artist of the modern fashion. In terms of style, we see a similarity between Zola's assessment of his contemporary, Edouard Manet, and the depiction of his character's talent. Of Manet he writes, 'Il s'est donc mis courageusement en face d'un sujet, il a vu ce sujet par larges taches, par oppositions vigoureuses, et il a peint chaque chose telle qu'il la voyait. […] Tout son être le porte à voir par taches, par morceaux simples et énergiques. […] Il arrive que la toile se couvre ainsi d'une peinture solide et forte'. [266] These same energetic, vigorous style of splashes of colour grace Laurent's work as well. Zola describes Laurent's paintings: 'Il y avait là cinq études, deux têtes de femme et trois têtes d'homme, peintes avec une véritable énergie; l'allure en était grasse et solide, chaque morceau s'enlevait par taches magnifiques sur les fonds d'un gris clair'.[267] Evidently, Laurent's *détraquement* has created in him an artistic sensibility that fits into what Zola seems to think is the best of the Naturalist school. However, in creating portraits that adhere to this style, Laurent has inadvertently exposed the

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[265] Ibid. 235-36.
[266] Zola, 'M. Manet', (*L'Evénement* 7 May 1866) *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 12, ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris : Cercle du livre précieux, 1969) 804-805.
[267] *TR*, 234.

raw and brutal chaos of his guilt-ridden mind. With each canvas, he resuscitates Camille. Tortured by his inability to produce a portrait of anyone but his victim, Laurent is reduced to a state of constant terror.

If Thérèse is blamed for the mental and physical decline of her white lover, she must also be responsible for the by-product of artistic genius that Laurent gains. Could Thérèse be a kind of catalyst for aesthetic inspiration? The ambivalence of Laurent's degeneracy recalls Gobineau's essay in which he establishes a contributory relationship between the degeneration of racial purity and the rise of civilisation. Miscegenation, while inevitably degrading the natural superiority of the white race can briefly lead to the revitalisation and enrichment of humanity. Gobineau suggests that it is the infusion of white blood into the 'inferior races' that ennobles them and produces great works of art and literature. This is not quite the argument that we see played out in Zola's work. In no way is Thérèse ennobled by her relationship with Laurent. Rather, it is Gobineau's acknowledgement that the degeneracy of white racial purity through miscegenation does, in fact, produce some positive effects, which links the essay to Zola's novel. Laurent's temperament degenerates into one more similar to Thérèse; he is degraded through racial mixture and is simultaneously instilled with artistic capacity and an elegant and modern sophistication. This newfound genius is short-lived, however: it self-destructs when Laurent realises that he can only paint Camille. So, in a sense, we see that decadent art, itself, degenerates.

The theme of art and painting plays an important metaphorical role in the novel. Henri Mitterand has proposed that *Thérèse Raquin* is a literary transposition of Manet's *Olympia* and *Lola de Valence* in its resemblance of technique and tone.

> Cette première apparition de Thérèse, immobilisée comme dans une séance de pose, recoupe étrangement les lignes que Zola consacre à *Olympia* dans son étude sur Edouard Manet, publiée quelques mois avant le roman dans *La Revue du XIX^{e} siècle.*

> Pour détacher le profil de Thérèse sur le fond de la boutique et pour contraster l'ombre et la lumière, Zola utilise la technique même qu'il attribue au peintre…[…] Quant à 'l'œil noir largement ouvert' de Thérèse, son visage à la blancheur mate et ses lèvres, 'deux minces traits d'un rose pâle', ce sont ceux-là même d'Olympia, que Zola, critique d'art, a décrits dans des termes exactement identiques. La technique et les tons de la nouvelle peinture donc.[268]

Mitterand's argument suggests that painting is more than simply a thematic choice in the novel; it could actually have been an inspiration for Zola's own literary artistry, and could reflect the ambivalent relationship between Zola the 'naturalist' and Zola the 'artist'. We have already examined the way in which Zola adds (invisible) colour to his heroine between the short story and the novel. 'Colouring', which could refer both to painting and to discoloured skin, seems to be associated with a certain kind of degenerate sexuality in the novel.[269] The character of Camille links together these two forms of colouring. After drowning, he appears to be 'verdâtre' – an image that is foreshadowed in Laurent's early (and terrible) portrait of him. His discoloured corpse becomes intimately involved in the sex life of Thérèse and Laurent: they hallucinate that he rests between them in their conjugal bed. Before his death, pale Camille is strangely sexless; it is in death and on canvas that he is coloured and becomes associated with unhealthy sexuality. Not only can colour connote unwholesome or degenerative sexuality; the addition of it creates (to borrow a term from Villiers) a *'Présence-Mixte'*, an artful illusion that not only substitutes for reality but is divorced from the original because it

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[268] Henri Mitterand, *Le Regard et le signe. Poétique du roman réaliste et naturaliste* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987) 121-2.

[269] We find, too, in *L'Œuvre*, that Claude is torn between the healthy sexuality of his wife, and the degenerate sexuality of his Painted Lady. For an interesting analysis of the use of colour in *Thérèse Raquin*, see Jurate D. Kaminskas's article '*Thérèse Raquin* et Manet: harmonie en gris' in *The French Review*, vol. LVII, no. 3 (February 1984): 309-319. In this article, Kaminskas suggests that colour is a particularly appropriate key in examining the novel because not only is it essential to Zola's attempt to produce 'l'effect de réel' but also because its evocative power enchances the 'poetic' nature of the text and highlights the internal contradictions that undermine 'pure realism'. Kaminskas embarks on a study of the associative significance of colour, particularly black, white, and their mixture 'intime', grey, which he associates with 'notations de silence, de froid, ou d'immobilité'.

proves to be more 'real' than 'Nature' itself.[270] Art, then, could be seen as a sterile endeavour, in that reproduction is linked to replication and not to procreation. In this way art could be associated with miscegenation in the sense that miscegenation, too, produces an entity which appears to *reproduce* something without actually *being* that thing. In both cases, creations will always be fundamentally divorced and different from their originators. Thus, both art and miscegenation are, in a sense, infertile because they are unable to produce their own 'true-bred' offspring. Gobineau's assertion that the world of the arts and of literature is a product of racial mixture underscores the peculiar relationship between art and miscegenation.[271]

The Naturalist Eye Delighting in the Decadent

Zola may bill his novel as a scientific experiment, but he, himself, recognises the poetics of his prose. He writes, 'Je préfère l'écran qui, serrant de plus près la réalité, se contente de mentir juste assez pour me faire sentir un homme dans une image de la création'.[272] Zola's 'écran réaliste' suggests a mediated reality in his novels that veils 'the truth' behind deceptive transparency. He suggests the need for paradoxical dissimulation built into the artistic rendering of the 'real'. In these observations we have an important disjunction between Zola's assertion of stable truth and reality that can be signified with the appropriate referents, and his contention that to create 'une image de la création' the author/artist must lie, embellish, or modify. As Janet Beizer says, 'Although Zola would ideally posit an image of transparency as the realist model, he admits the mediating presence, the

[270] See Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *L'Ève future* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1914) 98.
[271] 'Le monde des arts et de la noble littérature résultant des mélanges du sang, les races inférieures améliorées, ennoblies, sont autant de merveilles auxquelles il faut applaudir,' Gobineau, 1: 218.
[272] Zola to Antony Valabrègue, (18 August 1864) republished in *Oeuvres complètes* vol. 14, ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1969) 1314. 'Il est certes difficile de caractériser un écran qui a pour qualité principale celle de n'être presque pas; je crois, cependant, le bien juger, en disant qu'une fine poussière grise trouble sa limpidité. Tout objet, en passant par ce milieu, y perd de son éclat, ou plutôt, s'y noircit légèrement,' 1313.

determining presence, of the text'.[273] His is a horror story whose power comes from the semblance of scientific authority based on various contemporary theories of degeneration, neurosis, heredity, and race. Colette Becker demonstrates how Zola's plot rests upon widely recognised medical theories of the era. She specifically mentions Zola's borrowing of Deschanel's 1864 theory of four temperaments as described in his *Physiologie des écrivains et des artistes.*[274] She also refers to Dr. Moreau de Tours's 1859 *La Psychologie morbide, dans ses rapports avec la philosophie de l'histoire* in which the author asserts that genius is nothing but a nervous condition, an argument that Zola will use in his description of the mental deterioration of Laurent.[275] In addition, Zola will draw upon Prosper Lucas's *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle dans les états de santé et de maladie du système nerveux*. These contemporary theories provide the axis on which Zola's plot turns. Whether Zola believes in the veracity of the theories is moot. Rather, they provide him with a semblance of reality, or what Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau refers to as 'un trompe l'œil naturaliste'.[276] In his preliminary notes to *Les Rougon-Macquart* in 1868-9, Zola seems to consider the 'scientific' theories from which he borrows to provide plausibility for his works so that they need not be 'true' as long as they *seem* authoritative. Thorel-Cailleteau insightfully writes, 'Zola, scientiste aveugle, est une invention des critiques et des mauvaises lectures: il s'agissait moins de copier la science que de profiter de son autorité, de la parasiter dans la conviction qu'elle n'est pas plus rationnelle que l'art et qu'elle-même demande à être fondée'.[277] Similarly, I would argue that Zola's positivist machinery – his recourse to the laws of physiology and to race – provides him with a powerful narrative framework in which to situate a psychological horror story whose vivid descriptions of infernal sexuality, death,

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[273] Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies. Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 184. Refer to her reading of Barthes in relation to *Nana* in a section entitled, 'Uncovering Nana: The Courtesan's New Clothes', 174-87.
[274] Becker, 327.
[275] Ibid. 342.
[276] Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau, *La Tentation du livre sur rien: Naturalisme et Décadence* (Paris: Editions Interuniversitaires, 1994), 334.
[277] Ibid. 348

and violence are both enabled and legitimised by its 'scientific' premise. Consistency, verisimilitude, and authority, all three are boons of Zola's exploit of 'science' and the trappings of positivist methodology.

Unlike the anatomist, with whom Zola also makes a comparison, who dissects the human body disinterestedly in an effort to find positivist truth through a materialist examination, Zola is unable to resist condemning the behaviour of his characters with a collection of moral truisms. Zola refers to his characters' actions as *la débauche, l'impudeur, la luxure, le vice, la gloutonnerie*. Thérèse 'savait qu'elle faisait le mal' and Laurent acknowledges the murder of Camille as 'ignoble'. Just before the protagonists commit their simultaneous suicide, Thérèse and Laurent 'pleurèrent, sans parler, songeant à la vie de boue qu'ils avaient menée et qu'ils mèneraient encore, s'ils étaient assez lâches pour vivre'.[278] Zola's depiction of his characters and their behaviour is hardly as neutral as he would have us believe: the repugnance displayed in the narrative for the two protagonists seems to conflict with the painstaking analysis of the circumstances leading up to their adultery and murder. Russell Cousins similarly argues that the narrative editorialising with its intrusive comments about the thoughts and feelings of the protagonists undermines the professed objective of reporting observed phenomena.[279] Complete, disinterested, and objective observation on the part of Zola, as he champions it in the preface, is not achieved. Thérèse provides a first-rate vehicle for the incorporation of titillating scenes under the guise of both moral condemnation and scientific disinterest.

The piquancy of the numerous scenes of brutal and bestial sex, while ostensibly meant to illustrate 'scientifically' the repercussions of degeneracy and while editorialised with moral platitudes, fundamentally serve to heighten the novel's dramatic intensity and sensationalism. Despite Zola's assertion that his novel was

[278] *TR*, 315.
[279] Russell Cousins, *Zola's 'Thérèse Raquin'* (London : Grant & Cutler, 1992) 30.

meant to function as a 'roman expérimental' whose medical analysis of heredity and environment upon individuals would serve a didactic purpose, he was aware that the success of *Thérèse Raquin* would lie rather with its ability to shock, not necessarily to teach. In a letter to his publisher, Lacroix in September 1867, Zola writes of *Thérèse Raquin*, 'Je compte sur un succès d'horreur'.[280]

In *Mes Haines*, published a year before *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola writes, 'Mon goût, si l'on veut, est dépravé; j'aime les ragoûts littéraires fortement épicés, les œuvres de décadence où une sorte de sensibilité maladive remplace la santé plantureuse des époques classiques. Je suis de mon âge'.[281] His unremitting gaze upon the criminal and sadomasochistic sexual activities of his two brutish characters attests to his attraction to this 'depraved' sensibility. In the novel, pleasure is found in the horrifying ('le crime leur semblait une jouissance aiguë'[282]) and genius is born from degeneracy ('la névrose dont tout son être était secoué, développait en lui un sens artistique d'une lucidité étrange'[283]). Many critics have argued that one should view Decadence and Naturalism as interrelated aesthetics that both use the *topoi* of heredity, environment, and instinct to understand modern perversions and degeneration; that both conceive of nature as an indifferent, conditioning force

[280] Zola to Albert Lacroix (13 September 1867) *Correspondance d'Émile Zola*, vol. 1, 1858-1867, ed. B.H. Bakker (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1978) 522-3. Later that same month, he writes to Charles Coligny, the secrétaire de rédaction at *L'Artiste*, that he was aware of the possible public uproar that could result from certain explicit portions of the novel version of *Thérèse Raquin*. The serial publication of the novel in *L'Artiste* had stopped a month previously at the end of chapter ten because of these fears. Now that Lacroix planned to publish the novel in full, Zola authorised the suppression or excision of questionable passages by the publisher. In this letter, the author bitingly acknowledges that his novel could offend the modesty ('pudeur si méritoire') of the reading public whom he derisively calls 'chevaleresque et virginal'. Zola to Charles Coligny (25 September 1867) republished in *Correspondance d'Émile Zola*, vol. 1, 525-526. The polemical greeting of the novel should hardly have been a surprise to Zola; rather, he seems to have counted on it. Indeed, in a letter to Antony Valabrègue, Zola writes: 'Je crois m'y être mis cœur et chair. Je crains même de m'y être mis un peu trop en chair et d'émouvoir Monsieur le procureur impérial. Il est vrai que quelques mois de prison ne me font pas peur'. Zola to Valabrègue (29 May 1867) republished in *Correspondance d'Emile Zola*, 500.

[281] Zola, 'Mes Haines' *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 10, ed. Henri Mitterand, 23-92 (1866; Paris: Fasquelle 1968) 62.

[282] *TR*, 136.

[283] Ibid. 236.

over human beasts. [284] As Marion Schmid puts it, 'the crucial difference [between Naturalism and Decadence is] that whilst Decadent writers accept and even celebrate degeneracy as a prerequisite of artistic refinement, Naturalist writers denounce it as a threat to civilization'.[285]

In *Thérèse Raquin*, the eponymous heroine is represented as a type, determined by the inherited fatalism of blood. At the same time, she fits into a Decadent rhetoric of the *femme fatale*, whose overpowering sexuality infects and emasculates her male victim. We notice an almost vampire quality in the heroine as she 'se pendit à son [Laurent's] cou' and are reminded of Sue's reference to sexual vampirism, which is one of the traits commonly associated with *les filles de couleur*.[286] Enslaved by his mistress, Laurent is reduced to a hysteric with 'des nerfs de femmes'.[287] Zola's two protagonists – Laurent, the dissolute, perverted, emasculated aesthete and Thérèse, the neurotic Succubus – could be viewed as Decadent stock characters. Thérèse's hyper sexuality, sadomasochism, bestiality, and vampirism may be ostensibly pathological but Zola's treatment of them is hardly that of a disinterested scientist, as he claims. Instead, there is evident delight in the perverse and the piquant. Many passages remind us of Baudelaire's famous observation that love resembles an act of torture or a surgical operation.[288] In chapter seven, Thérèse says to Laurent, 'J'ignore comment je t'aimais; je te haïssais plutôt. […] Oh, que j'ai souffert! Et je cherchais cette souffrance' and

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[284] For more critical studies of Zola's relationship to the Decadent movement see Antoine Compagnon's essay, 'Zola dans la décadence' *Les Cahiers naturalistes,* vol. 67 (1993): 211-222; Marion Schmid, "From Decadence to Health: Zola's Paris" *Romance Studies*, 18.2 (2000), 99-111; and A.E. Carter, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature* 1830-1900 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958). See also Henri Mitterand's *Le Regard et le signe. Poétique du roman réaliste et naturaliste*.

[285] Schmid, 103-4.

[286] Ibid. 58.

[287] *TR*, 235. 'Il ne s'appartenait plus, sa maîtresse, avec ses souplesses de chatte, ses flexibilités nerveuses, s'était glissée peu à peu dans chacune des fibres de son corps. Il avait besoin de cette femme pour vivre comme on a besoin de boire et de manger.' Ibid. 77.

[288] 'Entendez-vous ces soupirs, préludes d'une tragédie de déshonneur, ces gémissements, ces cris, ces râles? Qui ne les a proférés, qui ne les a irrésistiblement extorqués? Et que trouvez-vous de pire dans la question appliquée par de soigneux tortionnaires?' Baudelaire, 'Fusées' in *Journaux intimes* ed. Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin (Paris: Librarie José Corti, 1949) 10.

'…une force fatale me ramenait à ton coté, je respirais ton air avec des délices cruelles'.[289] Here we are reminded, perhaps, of a similar exclamation from Jacques Ferrand in the throes of madness. Suffering seems to be a standard element in all of these relationships. Moreover, it is sought, thus substantiating the suggestion of sadomasochism inherent in interracial sex.

Zola's fixation upon the perverse and the violent as leitmotiv undermines any seemingly objective materialism posited in the preface. Becker and Thorel-Cailleteau suggest that Zola's scientific project is perturbed by an obsession with death, sex, and madness that veers the narrative away from disinterested analysis. Becker synopsizes this argument nicely: 'Thérèse Raquin peut se lire comme une rêverie de la mort, comme une obsession de l'enlisement, de l'émiettement, comme une interrogation angoissée devant la folie et la décomposition des êtres, leitmotiv de l'œuvre'.[290]

Conclusion

In *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola taps into contemporary fears of individual and social deterioration linked to uncontrolled (deviant) sexuality through his heroine, whose rampant and destructive sexual nature is depicted as fundamentally degenerate. By connecting colour, gender, and class, Zola fits Thérèse into a larger discourse that links prostitutes, persons of colour, and the working class as congruent types of degenerates. Moreover, the qualities associated with her identity as *métisse* – namely her wantonness, vampirism, bestiality, duplicity, and her lethal effect on her male lover – similarly place her within the figuration of the Decadent femme fatale. Zola's recourse to contemporary scientific theories allows him to explain this decadence in the rhetoric of pathology. Conversely, his pseudo-scientific text exploits to great effect the titillating eroticism embedded within his 'experiment'.

[289] *TR*, 63 and 64.
[290] Becker, 346.

His interest in fracture, dissolution, and disintegration, his pleasure in a detailed rendering of the horror of emotional and physical deterioration is articulated through the figure of the *métisse*. As *métisse,* Thérèse proves a useful vehicle to convey the inexorable power of heredity over identity and behaviour. It is no wonder that Zola rewrote his story to imbue his heroine with the necessary colour and thus the necessary characteristics to propel the plot. The addition of colour not only connotes unwholesome and degenerative sexuality, it provides a link to the theme of artistic (re)production and with it, the paradox of decadent creation. Like Gobineau, Zola treats the *métisse* as both an embodiment of the threat of degeneration and of the creative power of mixing. She both debases and stimulates her white male lover and what results is a kind of swansong, a final burst of creativity in the midst of inevitable destruction.

The themes of decadent creation and stimulating debasement will take on a biographical component in the following chapter, which will examine the biographical and critical portraits of Jeanne Duval, the much-maligned partner of the celebrated poet, Charles Baudelaire. Described by one critic as his 'muse fatale', Jeanne becomes an incarnation of the simultaneously desirable and degenerative coloured femme fatale that we have seen thus far in our examination of literary representations of the *métisse* figure. The fascinating irony is, however, that Jeanne was a living woman whose body and character were appropriated and caricaturised to approximate contemporary racial stereotype. The process of myth-making is clearly evident as generations of biographers and literary critics remodel a real woman – Jeanne – into a symbol of licentious and detrimental sexuality – the 'Vénus noire' – whose body they will in turn inscribe upon the poetry of Baudelaire. The same themes that have been examined thus far, which include exhibition and power, protean identity, degeneration and decadence, prostitution, and the convergence of taxonomy and titillation will be addressed in the next

chapter, but with a special eye toward the process of reading as implicit in the creation of myth and stereotype.

Chapter Five

The Mythology of Jeanne Duval

This chapter seeks to study the process of gender and racial construction by charting the mythology of Jeanne Duval, Charles Baudelaire's long time *métisse* mistress, in the ambivalent meeting of poetry and historical biography. I will argue that the interplay between biographical commentary, racist stereotype, and literary critique works to create the legendary and infamous 'Vénus noire', whose notoriety as the licentious figure inscribed onto some of Baudelaire's most sensual and carnal poems, seems at times to rival that of the celebrated *poète maudit.* Any attempt at unravelling and understanding the mythology of Jeanne as muse, *mégère,* and incarnation of vice requires pinpointing her arrival on the literary criticism scene. I suggest that the mythology of Jeanne Duval was a process that turned into a static and rigid symbol a truly ambiguous woman whose birth, death, name, physical appearance, moral character, and temperament have all been debated. This symbol was then placed upon and interacted with the poetry of Baudelaire in the form of the 'cycle de la Vénus noire'.

My approach will be threefold: firstly, I will examine the historical figure of Jeanne of whom so little is known and yet much surmised; secondly, I will appraise the circular logic that conflates Jeanne with the critical creation of the 'Vénus noire'; and thirdly, I will suggest that there is a way of reading the poems ostensibly for or about Jeanne that recognises the powerful racialist and exoticist imagery that Baudelaire employs for his specific ends, while refusing to make the unfounded leap to assume these literary conventions provide us with an unmediated reflection of this shadowy woman.

By resorting to the epithet, 'Vénus noire' in reference to Jeanne Duval, critics and biographers have systematically effaced her individuality and undermined her role as the lover, muse, and partner of the famous poet.[291] She has become a receptacle of racist stereotype that denies her any constructive or creative function; rather, she has been seen as the great impediment to the poet's work, his most foolhardy mistake for which he would pay greatly. In most biographies, Jeanne is deemed to have duped, through her erotic wiles, the hapless poet who could do nothing to resist her seductive power, which would lead to his physical destruction.[292] One critic even suggests that she is proof positive of Baudelaire's neurosis.[293] It is only

[291] The critical reception, which I will examine, spans from approximately the 1880s to the 1960s, with two notable recent exceptions in 1977 (by A.E. Carter) and 1993 (by Claude Pichois). Emmanuel Richon is, as far as I have been able to ascertain, the primary scholar to attempt a rewriting of Jeanne's biography and to question the cycle structure with her primarily in mind, and I refer liberally in this chapter to Richon's excellently documented book and bibliography. See *Jeanne Duval et Charles Baudelaire. Belle d'Abandon* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998). Christopher Miller similarly questions muse attribution in *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) 69-70. His examination of Baudelaire's theory of colour in his art criticism, as well as his articulations of race and the exotic in several key poems is excellent, and will be referred to later in the chapter. Certainly, in recent years (i.e. from the 1970s onward), the term 'Black Venus cycle' has disappeared for the most part and has been replaced with the 'Jeanne Duval poems' or the 'Jeanne cycle'. Edward Ahearn and others have used these poems to explore the way in which Baudelaire writes of interactions between self and other, male and female, black and white. See Ahearn, 'Black Woman, White Poet: Exile and Exploitation in Baudelaire's "Jeanne Duval Poems"' in *French Review*, vol. LI, no. 2 (December 1977): 212-220. Beatrice Smith Clark writes in a 1970 article, 'The poems [of the Jeanne Duval cycle] remain apart from the others because they interpret and crystallize, not only the emotions of the poet, but his poetic theory through an element unique to the subject – the element of blackness. For Baudelaire...this was the essence of the exotic. This differentness we shall term "black exoticism"'. See Clark, 'Elements of Black Exoticism in the 'Jeanne Duval' Poems of *Les Fleurs du mal*' in *CLA Journal* 14, no. 1 [September 1970]: 62-74. While I think that Ahearn and Smith are correct to examine Baudelaire's representation of the exotic, I have doubts about their basic premise of the 'Jeanne Cycle' and the biographical element that is often implicit in these accounts. A recent reading of *Les Fleurs du mal* by Mario Richter (2001), speaks of an 'exotic woman' often present in the poems but refuses the cycle system as such, arguing that if Baudelaire wished such divisions to be in evidence, he would have made them so. Richter also suggests that one could read a variety of women into the poems, women who merge, cross, disappear, and reappear. This reading, I find to be the most compelling, and I will discuss it later in the chapter. See Richter, *Baudelaire. 'Les Fleurs du mal'. Lecture intégrale* (Genève: Éditions Slatkine, 2001) 379-80.

[292] Claude Pichois writes that 'Jeanne était une femme de couleur. L'envie de scandaliser n'est pas à exclure du choix que Baudelaire fit de cette maîtresse dont il avait subi la séduction et qui, peut-être, lui infusa son venin, celui de la syphilis' in *Baudelaire-Paris* (Paris: Editions des Musées de la ville de Paris, 1993) 75.

[293] Maurice Barrès writes in 'La Folie de Charles Baudelaire' in *Taches d'encre*, 5 December 1884, 'Baudelaire du reste, était victime d'une névrose fondamentale: sa liaison avec Jeanne Duval nous en fournit la preuve', cited in Richon's *Jeanne Duval et Charles Baudelaire*, 107.

the ringing assertions of Jeanne's importance to his life and work by his closest friends that cast doubt upon the overwhelming chorus of detractors. Théodore de Banville writes in his *Lettres chimériques* in 1885:

> Nous qui avons mieux fait que de connaître Baudelaire, nous qui l'avons toujours suivi, admiré, et aimé, nous savons que sa vie entière, comme son œuvre, fut remplie par un seul amour, et que du premier jour au dernier, il aima une seule femme, cette Jeanne, admirablement belle, gracieuse et spirituelle, qu'il a toujours chantée. […] Le poète l'aimait à vingt ans, il l'aima toujours.[294]

Despite the declarations of his closest friends and Baudelaire's own testimony in letters and journals, Jeanne Duval has become a name associated with sexual immodesty, dissipation, and vice.

Une femme sans nom

Jacques Crépet, one of the leading Baudelaire scholars, whose prolific work on the poet has spanned fifty years, attempts to outline Jeanne's tenuous history in a 1937 article that will later be included in his *Propos sur Baudelaire.*[295] Crépet writes of a baptismal certificate for an illegitimate Jeanne-Marie-Marthe who was baptised in 1789 to a Marie Duval in a parish in Nantes. Crépet concludes that Marie Duval's appellation of *fille* rather than *célibataire* indicates that she was a prostitute. Nantes being a major port for ships arriving from Guinea and the Antilles, it is possible, Crépet muses, that Marie Duval had relations with a man of African origin, thus producing a mulatto daughter who later would be the mother of Jeanne. He writes, 'En voilà assez, je crois, pour expliquer les tristes hérédités qu'accusa l'amie de Baudelaire, Jeanne Duval, alias Jeanne Lemer, selon toute vraisemblance la fille de Jeanne Lemaire, inhumée à Belleville, et la petite-fille de

[294] Théodore de Banville, *Lettres chimériques* (Paris: Charpentier, 1885) 281-82.
[295] Jacques Crépet, 'Une femme à enterrer' (Mercure de France, 15 April 1937) in *Propos sur Baudelaire,* ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957) 154-55.

la prostituée nantaise Marie Duval – et aussi comment un peu de sang noir pouvait être venu teinter les épaules grasses de la "noble enchanteresse."'[296] Before we comment on the possible veracity of this explication, let us first explore two assumptions implicit in the passage. Firstly, there is a sense of tragic heredity in Crépet's description of Jeanne as 'la petite-fille de la prostituée nantaise'. In the 'tristes hérédités' there is a strong sense of fatalism: prostitution becomes an inherited characteristic that is impossible for Jeanne's mother and Jeanne to avoid.[297] Emmanuel Richon suggests that Crépet's argument attempts to scapegoat Jeanne as the culprit behind Baudelaire's syphilis. Her allegedly immoral background would only help to support suspicions that Jeanne was responsible for the death of the poet, and thus further diabolise her.[298] Secondly, Crépet's mention of 'la noble enchanteresse' refers to the poem, 'A une dame créole', which was dedicated to a white 'femme de colon' whom Baudelaire met on his travels.[299] By comparing the white woman with Jeanne in this reference, Crépet implies that the infusion of black blood has not only tinted the shoulders of the (formerly white) noble enchantress but also indelibly blackened or tarnished her. Richon believes that this appellation was chosen with the specific intent to malign Jeanne by focusing upon the colour of her skin as a sign of her impropriety.[300] In addition, I propose that Crépet articulates the contemporary fear of racial degeneracy. Racialist ideals of beauty from bygone ages, such as the white, noble enchantress of the poem, have been diluted and desecrated by the degenerative process of *métissage* of which Jeanne has become the symbol. Furthermore, the implicit ridicule couched in the comparison between the noble white woman and the coloured daughter (and grand-daughter) of a prostitute serves to belittle Jeanne. In terms of veracity, Crépet's study is based primarily on supposition, and is tenuous

[296] Ibid. 155.
[297] As we have seen, Zola takes up this theme of inherited degeneration, particularly in the form of prostitution, in his representations of both Thérèse Raquin and Nana.
[298] Richon, 16.
[299] Mme Autard de Bragard was Baudelaire's hostess during his brief sojourn in Mauritius. The poem was sent to her husband in a letter dated 20 October 1841. See Baudelaire, *Correspondance générale*, vol. 1, 1833-56, compiled by Jacques Crépet (Paris: Editions Louis Conard, 1917) 15-16.
[300] Richon, 17.

at best. We see that his portrait of Jeanne is influenced by implicit racism that colours his supposedly objective interpretation. Crépet's study is just one of many conflicting theories regarding Jeanne's birth and parentage that pivot on her skin colour.

She is alternatively called Jeanne Duval, Jeanne Lemer, and Jeanne Prosper. In addition, during her years as an actress at Porte-Sainte-Antoine from 1838-39, she is said to have worked under the stage name, Berthe.[301] One biographer writes of Jeanne as a 'théâtreuse, prostituée, cette belle mulâtresse dont on ne connut jamais la véritable origine'.[302] Swathed in ambiguity, she was *une femme sans nom*, an epithet that Baudelaire would later use in the title of a sketch of her.[303] Despite the fact that most accounts of Jeanne make reference to her racially-mixed heritage, Baudelaire's companions are said to have referred to Jeanne simply as 'sa négresse'.[304] This nickname foreshadows the later appellation of 'Vénus noire'. In both cases, the names affix a sense of (false) stability to a figure of which nothing seems certain. Both reduce Jeanne to nothing more than colour and gender. In a century notable for the attempted precision with which it charted racial distinction, it is fascinating to witness the imprecision inherent in every depiction of Jeanne. Just as very precise systems of racial taxonomy were being erected to differentiate mulatto from quadroon from octoroon, there existed a concurrent trend toward ambiguity and vagueness. We will see that even as certain authors attempt to label her, these supposedly precise terms prove slippery and troublesome. Is she a *mulâtresse*, a *quarteronne*, a *négresse*, or is she even deemed racially 'black'?[305]

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[301] Félix Nadar describes her appearance on stage in his book, *Charles Baudelaire intime; le poète vierge* (Paris: A. Blaizot, 1911). This will be discussed in greater depth later.
[302] Claude Delarue, *L'Enfant idiot: honte et révolte chez Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Belfond, 1997) 104.
[303] See Claude Pichois's *Baudelaire-Paris*, 202-3, which displays a number of sketches purportedly of Jeanne including 'Femme sans nom' in which the model closely resembles the others.
[304] Richon, 17.
[305] Refer back to chapters one and two.

Jeanne equally represents Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. In an 1893 article in *La Plume*, Marquis Daruty de Grandpré writes of the highly contentious debate regarding Jeanne's origins.[306] He mentions several contradictory theories placing Jeanne in Mauritius, in India, in Bourbon, in Cape of Good Hope and other African regions where Baudelaire is supposed to have found her and brought her back to France. Maxime du Camp suggests that Jeanne, 'une négresse ou une quarteronne' was brought back from the Cape of Good Hope by Baudelaire;[307] Théophile Gautier in his *Notice sur Baudelaire* writes of a 'beauté fauve, signare du Cap ou bayadère de l'Inde';[308] Eugène Crépet, father of Jacques Crépet and one of the earliest and most influential biographers of Baudelaire, believes that she was born in Saint- Domingue.[309] An anonymous article published on 13 September 1867 in La Chronique de Paris describes Jeanne as 'une laya (nom indien des bonnes d'enfants), belle et ardente négresse'. The article goes on to say that Jeanne and Baudelaire met on a boat returning from France. Baudelaire was returning home after his brief travels and Jeanne was accompanying a Creole family that was repatriating.[310] Victor Noir's article on Jeanne, published the day after the poet's death, goes even further into the realm of fantasy in his portrait: 'A Madras, il [Baudelaire] se lia avec une Indienne qu'à Paris on appelait: Le Monstre noir.

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[306] Marquis Daruty de Grandpré, 'Baudelaire et Jeanne Duval', *La Plume: littéraire, artistique, et sociale*, 103 (1 August 1893; reprint Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1968) 329-33.

[307] Maxime du Camp, *Souvenirs littéraires*, vol. 2 (Paris: Editions Hachette, 1892) 60. Du Camp mentions that, 'une ou deux fois il me parla de cette fée noire avec un attendrissement qui prouvait un attachement sincère'.

[308] Théophile Gautier, *Notice sur Baudelaire*, cited in Daruty de Grandpré, 331. Amadou Dialo defines 'signare' thus : 'Du portugais *senhora*, **signare** désigne une métisse saint-louisienne (ou goréenne) de haut statut social et de religion chrétienne'. Amadou Dialo et Francis Gandon, *Littérature française et langue africaine : l'exemple de Pierre Loti* accessed from http://www.unice.fr/ILF-CNRS/ofcaf/15/Dialo.html, on 16 September 2005.

309Eugène Crépet**,** *Charles Baudelaire: étude biographique: d'Eugène Crépet***,** revised and completed by Jacques Crépet (Paris: Albert Messein, 1919) 56.

[310] Cited in Richon, 47. This theory would contradict the accounts of Félix Nadar and Théophile Gautier, who both claim to have met Jeanne in Paris, prior to her relationship with Baudelaire.

Cette femme, au dire de ceux qui l'ont connue, fut la cause de la perte de Baudelaire, en exerçant sur lui une influence fatale'.[311]

From *négresse* to *quarteronne*, to *laya*, to *signare*, to *indienne* to *monstre*, Jeanne is simultaneously all of the above. Each epithet is equivalent to the other because they share one common denominator: they all are functions of being other (non-white). After perusing the variety of labels that all seem to apply equally to this woman of whom only her otherness can be certain, it would seem that the cultural and geographical imprecision associated with Jeanne, which is expressed beautifully in 'La Chevelure', allows for multiple (and contradictory) incarnations according to the particular fantasies of her 'biographers'. In 'La Chevelure' we witness a lyrical portrait of a woman who incarnates exotic realms far removed from the desolate urban world in which the poet resides ('La langoureuse Asie et la brûlante Afrique / Tout un monde lointain, absent, presque défunt / Vit dans tes profondeurs, forêt aromatique!'[312]). Ironically, this portrait comes to a kind of uncanny fruition in the biographical studies that attempt to reconstruct the life and ancestry of Jeanne, who – much like the woman in the poem – comes to represent all that is vague and exotic. This example of the cross-fertilisation between critical analysis and biography foreshadows an entire process by which a single and shadowy woman will become a static symbol that then will become a monstrous caricature.

Portraits of Jeanne

Jeanne's life history is known primarily through its intersection with the lives of several famous Parisian literary men, notably Félix Nadar, Théodore Banville, and Charles Baudelaire. Nadar and Baudelaire both had romantic liaisons with her, and each of the three immortalised her in his writing. It is ironic that any attempt to

[311] Victor Noir, 'Paris-Journal. Notes parisiennes', *Journal de Paris* (3 September 1867) published in W.T. Bandy's *Baudelaire Judged by his Contemporaries (1845-1867)* (New York: Publications of the Institute of French Studies, Inc., 1933) 110.
[312] Charles Baudelaire, 'La Chevelure', *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ed. Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin (Paris: Librarie José Corti, 1942) 26-7.

redress the erasure of Jeanne's identity is practically doomed from the outset. She does not exist to us outside of texts through which her persona is mediated. Any individuality is absent; her identity only exists insofar as it relates to the famous poet and his colleagues.[313] The accretion of commentary, speculation, condemnation, and delectation upon the vague figure of Jeanne has created a mythical embodiment of racial and sexual fears, desires, and uncertainties. I will attempt to chart this accretion.

Until the publication of Baudelaire's private journals and letters, very little was written about his personal relationships and indeed, there are no direct references to Jeanne in his poetry. Richon suggests that Baudelaire's metaphorical epithets such as 'la grande taciturne', 'belle d'abandon', 'belle visiteuse', and 'grande ténébreuse' refer to Jeanne. It is certain, however, that 'Vénus noire' appears nowhere in his work. One could go so far as to suggest that Baudelaire consciously avoided displaying the most important of his mistresses, Jeanne.[314] One example is the oft-told anecdote about Courbet's 1855 *Allégorie réelle, l'atelier du peintre* that was originally meant to include a portrait of Baudelaire and Jeanne. As the story goes, according to Eugène Delacroix in his journal, Baudelaire asked Courbet to erase the portrait of Jeanne that originally had been included in the tableau. The theory that Baudelaire wished to keep his relationship with Jeanne a secret has been further substantiated by what many critics, including Eugène Crépet, believe

[313] An important exception is a passage from Emma Calvé's book, *Sous tous les ciels j'ai chanté* (Paris: Plon, 1940) 140, cited in Richon, 158-9. In this passage, Calvé records her meeting with a sixty-year-old Jeanne Duval who briefly but crucially speaks for herself of her relationship with Baudelaire. I have only found a mention of this interview in Richon's book. Calvé reportedly asked Jeanne, '– Vous devez être bien glorieuse d'avoir été aimée d'un si grand écrivain ? /

– Oui, dit-elle en se redressant. Ah ! il m'aimait bien. C'était un bel amant, si doux avec moi, mais pas rigolo, toujours triste, avec…des fantaisies de l'autre monde. / Et, en soupirant: / Je ne vous souhaite pas, mes toutes belles, d'être aimées d'un poète, fût-il le plus grand de tous ! Puis elle retira d'un coffret des lettres dont elle nous lut certains passages, mais qu'elle ne nous permit pas de toucher. / – Ce sont mes reliques, dit-elle. J'en ai vendu quelques-unes, car je ne suis pas riche, mais celles-ci, les premières et les dernières qu'il m'écrivit, me suivront dans le cercueil !'

[314] Baudelaire's relationship with Jeanne spanned over twenty years, far surpassing his other rather brief affairs with Apollonie Sabatier and Marie Daubrun.

is a cryptic dedication to a certain 'J.G.F.' at the beginning of *Les Paradis arificiels.* In this dedication, he writes,

> Ma chère amie, […] Il importe d'ailleurs fort peu que la raison de cette dédicace soit comprise. Est-il même bien nécessaire, pour le contentement de l'auteur, qu'un livre quelconque soit compris, excepté de celui ou de celle pour qui il a été composé ? […] Mais ce n'est pas à une morte que je dédie ce petit livre; c'est à une qui, quoique malade, est toujours active et vivante en moi, et qui tourne maintenant tous ses regards vers le Ciel, ce lieu de toutes les transfigurations.[315]

Whether this was written to Jeanne has never been sufficiently proved or disproved. However, at the time of his writing the dedication (1860), Jeanne had been suffering from paralysis for almost a year. Moreover, the tone of the dedication recalls some of letters about and to Jeanne: 'Moi, je n'ai que *Jeanne Lemer*. Je n'ai trouvé de repos qu'en elle'; 'Elle est le seul être en qui j'aie trouvé quelque repos'; and 'Jeanne Lemer est la seule femme que j'aie aimée'[316]. In another letter, he writes, 'La sombre solitude que j'ai faite autour de moi…*ne m'a lié à Jeanne que plus étroitement*'[317]. Even when the affair has ended, he writes to his mother,

> Moi, je sais que, quelque agréable aventure, plaisir, argent, ou vanité qui m'arrive, je regretterai toujours cette femme. Pour que ma douleur, que vous ne comprendrez peut-être pas bien, ne vous paraisse pas trop enfantine, je vous avouerai que j'avais mis sur cette tête toutes mes espérances, comme un joueur; cette femme était ma seule distraction, mon seul plaisir, mon seul camarade, et malgré toutes les secousses intérieures d'une liaison tempétueuse, jamais l'idée d'une séparation irréparable n'était entrée clairement dans mon esprit. Encore maintenant, et cependant je suis tout à fait

[315] Excerpt from the dedication to *Les Paradis artificiels* in *Œuvres complètes de Baudelaire,* edited and annotated by Y.-G. Le Dantec (Paris: Gallimard, 1956) 435-36.
[316] Letter from Baudelaire to M. Ancelle (30 June 1845) in *Correspondance générale,* 1: 71 -72.
[317] Letter from Baudelaire to M. Ancelle (10 January 1850) in *Correspondance générale,* 1: 122.

> calme, – je me surprends à penser en voyant un bel objet quelconque, un beau paysage, n'importe quoi d'agréable: pourquoi n'est-elle pas avec moi, pour admirer cela avec moi, pour acheter cela avec moi?[318]

All of these excerpts suggest the singularity of Baudelaire's relationship with Jeanne. For a man who so associates himself with solitude and exile, here we find him acknowledging his reliance upon and his regard for Jeanne as friend, confidante, and beloved. So, too, his dedication seems to be a private moment, a secret conversation meant specifically (and only) for the eyes of the one woman whom he keeps alive inside of him.[319] His emphasis on the unintelligibility of the dedication underscores what can only be called a sense of 'pudeur' that he maintained over all of his personal life. As he writes to his mother, 'généralement je cache ma vie, et mes pensées, et mes angoisses, même à toi'.[320]

Baudelaire's reserve can be seen in the lack of romantic anecdotes about a poet whose status as *enfant terrible* ought, one would have thought, to have produced outrageous stories. Charles Asselineau's biographical study published the day after Baudelaire's death was greeted with frustration at the lack of personal anecdotes. 'Je ne vous dirai pas qu'il aurait fallu nous conter ses amours; mais enfin on aimerait à deviner qu'il y avait là un cœur vivant, battant pour quelque chose…Vous nous le montrez absolument comme si l'homme se reproduisait par boutures, comme si les femmes n'existaient absolument pas.'[321] The consequence of this lack of anecdotal material on the relationship between Baudelaire and Jeanne is that much of what was subsequently written about their liaison has little, if any, evidence to support it. Despite portraits made of her by two of the most

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[318] Letter from Baudelaire to Mme Aupick (11 September 1856) in *Correspondance générale*, 1: 398.

[319] While most biographers assume that J.G.F. refers to Jeanne, Y. G. Le Dantec denies fervently the possibility: 'A relire cette admirable confession, il est vraiment impossible de supposer un instant qu'elle puisse avoir pour destinatrice une créature aussi vulgaire, aussi sourde à la poésie que le fut Jeanne Duval...' *Œuvres complètes de Baudelaire*, 1457

[320] Letter from Baudelaire to Mme Aupick (17 March 1862) in *Correspondance générale*, 4: 67.

[321] Letter from Francis Wey to Charles Asselineau (4 February 1869) published in Jacques Crépet's *Le Bulletin du bibliophile* (March 1946): 125-7.

famous painters of the era, Courbet and Manet,[322] and the general acknowledgement by Baudelaire's artist friends of his relationship with Jeanne, her popular notoriety would not gain currency until after Baudelaire's death and the subsequent publication of his journals and correspondence. The resources most often referred to in biographical studies of Jeanne are Baudelaire's letters, his mother's reference to her as the 'Vénus noire',[323] and the firsthand accounts by Nadar, Banville, and several others of Baudelaire's circle of friends such as Ernest Prarond and Jules Buisson. All of these were published after the death of Baudelaire.[324]

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[322] Manet's *La Maîtresse de Baudelaire couchée*, painted in 1862 is one of the few pictorial images we have of Jeanne. In it, we see a sick and ageing woman nearing the end of her life. See Therese Dolan's article, 'Skirting the Issue: Manet's portrait of *Baudelaire's Mistress, Reclining*' in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 79, no. 4. (December 1997): 611-629.

[323] Letter from Mme. Aupick to Charles Asselineau (24 March 1868), published in Eugène Crépet, *Charles Baudelaire*, 267. 'A quelques rares défaillances près, je l'ai toujours trouvé fort ; je ne l'ai jamais vu se laisser abattre au milieu de ses plus grands malheurs, car votre ami a été bien malheureux, plus malheureux que vous ne pouvez croire! La Vénus noire l'a torturé de toutes manières. Oh ! Si vous saviez ! Et que d'argent elle lui a dévoré ! Dans ses lettres, j'en ai une masse, je ne vois jamais un mot d'amour. Si elle l'avait aimé, je lui pardonnerais, je l'aimerais peut-être; mais ce sont des demandes incessantes d'argent. C'est toujours de l'argent qu'il lui faut, et *immédiatement.* Sa dernière, en avril 1866, lorsque je partais pour aller soigner mon pauvre fils à Bruxelles, lorsqu'il était sur son lit de douleur et paralysé, et qu'il était dans de si grands embarras d'argent, elle lui écrit pour une somme qu'il faut qu'il lui envoie de suite. Comme il a dû souffrir à cette demande qu'il ne pouvait satisfaire ! Tous ces tiraillements ont pu aggraver son mal et pouvaient même en être la cause.'

[324] While Baudelaire's letters provide a wealth of information about his tumultuous love affair with Jeanne, they are often cited piecemeal insofar as they substantiate the biographer's portrait of Jeanne. Biographers and critics are quick to condemn Jeanne for being an impediment to Baudelaire's work. Their evidence is taken from an extremely emotional Baudelaire in the midst of (temporarily) breaking with Jeanne. 'Jeanne est devenue un obstacle non seulement à mon bonheur, – ceci serait peu de chose, moi aussi je sais sacrifier mes plaisirs, et je l'ai prouvé; – mais encore au perfectionnement de mon esprit. Les 9 mois qui viennent de s'écouler sont une expérience décisive. Jamais les grands devoirs que j'ai à accomplir, paiement de mes dettes, *la conquête* de mes titres de fortune, l'acquisition de la célébrité, le soulagement aux douleurs que je t'ai causées, ne se pourront accomplir dans de pareilles conditions. *Jadis elle avait quelques qualités*, mais elle les a *perdues* ; et moi j'ai gagné en clairvoyance. VIVRE AVEC UN ÊTRE qui ne vous sait aucun gré de vos efforts, qui les contrarie par une maladresse ou une méchanceté permanente, qui ne vous considère que comme son domestique et sa propriété, avec qui il est impossible d'échanger une parole politique ou littéraire, une créature *qui ne veut rien apprendre*, quoique vous lui ayiez [sic] proposé de lui donner vous-même des leçons, une créature QUI NE M'ADMIRE PAS, et qui ne s'intéresse même pas à mes études, qui jetterait mes manuscrits au feu si cela lui rapportait plus d'argent que de les laisser publier, qui renvoie mon chat qui était ma seule distraction au logis, et qui introduit des chiens, *parce que* la vue des chiens me fait mal, qui ne sait pas ou ne veut pas comprendre *qu'être très avare, pendant* UN *mois seulement*, me permettrait, grâce à ce repos

Even the firsthand accounts of Jeanne by Banville and Nadar are written at least thirty or forty years after the events that they relate and must be regarded with caution. They are prompted, particularly in the case of Banville, by an attempt to set the record straight, to legitimise Jeanne and Baudelaire's love affair with her. To this end, Banville writes in his *Lettres chimériques*:

> …Jeanne n'était pas noire du tout; elle était même blanche. Sans aucun doute c'était une fille de couleur; les créoles, qui se connaissent à ces choses, le constataient infailliblement, au moyen de cette légère ligne blanche sur l'ongle que rien n'efface, et qui est le signe distinctif; enfin elle avait la sveltesse, le geste agile, la grâce molle et séductrice des sang-mêlé (sic); mais elle n'était lustrée ni comme l'ébène, ni comme rien qui soit noir.[325]

This passage reads like an apologia for Baudelaire's love for Jeanne. She is legitimised because *she is not black but white (ish).* Banville's repeated emphasis on her lack of blackness (note the repetition of the negative) implies a rather anxious assertion of her beauty and her suitability, while at the same time, he admits that she is undoubtedly coloured. It is only the subtle signs that suggest her biracial background: the white line on her fingernail and her seductive grace, both of which we have witnessed elsewhere. In Sue's depiction of Cecily, which was similarly based upon these corporeal signs of colour, the emphasis was upon asserting difference in the face of similarity. Here, conversely, Banville stresses Jeanne's 'whitishness' *despite* the material evidence of colour. Banville's justification of Jeanne derives from the wish to erase the 'unseemly' aspect of Baudelaire's love affair, to change the 'improper' partner of such a celebrated poet into someone more suitable. In direct opposition to Jacques Crépet's focus upon the blackness of Jeanne ('un peu de sang noir pouvait être venu teinter les épaules

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momentané, de finir un gros livre, – enfin est-ce possible cela, est-ce possible?' Letter from Baudelaire to Mme Aupick (27 March 1852) in *Correspondance générale*, 1: 162-63.

[325] Banville, *Lettres chimériques*, 281-282.

grasses de la "noble enchanteresse"'), Banville denies it to the furthest extent that he is able. While their methods differ, both Crépet and Banville attempt to diminish Jeanne, to defuse her powerful potential as a beloved and influential partner to the poet. Crépet does this by maligning her: she is a product of prostitution and carries the stigma of tragic *métissage* in her colour; she is the unfortunate mistake of Baudelaire. Banville achieves this by refashioning her character according to the aesthetic (and we assume) moral standards of the era. By denying her racial identity, Banville equally demonstrates his distaste for apparent signs of taboo interracial relations between his friend and a woman of colour.[326] For both men, Jeanne does not exist as an individual but as a type. Banville places upon her the characteristics associated with *sang-mêlées*: her grace, seductiveness, and agility are functions of her race rather than her person. Crépet places her in a tragic and fatalistic lineage of prostitution and *métissage*. Both Banville and Crépet focus upon Jeanne as seductress or enchantress; she is tangibly sensual in both brief portraits. Félix Nadar will continue, with greater fervour and at greater length, to centre upon the corporeal Jeanne. Even the way in which he presents her to his reader demonstrates her primary function as a physical object to be admired, a force of nature that incites attraction.

In a book entitled *Baudelaire intime*, Nadar spends an inordinate amount of time on the figure of Jeanne. He invents a friend with whom she is meant to have an affair when in fact it was Nadar, himself, who had a relationship with her before she met Baudelaire. Nadar first displays Jeanne to his reader as an actress onstage before a stunned Parisian audience, surprised by her extraordinary height and colour. 'Ce n'est rien: cette soubrette d'extradimension (sic) est une négresse, une

[326] We find the same attempt to diminish Jeanne – to diffuse her power – in an account of her by Prarond. In his description, her beauty, femininity and inspirational qualities are all greatly reduced: 'Oui, j'ai connu Jeanne. […] Elle me faisait l'effet d'une fille très passive. Je la traitais avec beaucoup d'égards, et j'étais, me disait Baudelaire, le seul de ses amis qu'elle pût souffrir…Voici, dans mes souvenirs, le portrait de Jeanne : mulâtresse, pas très noire, pas très belle, cheveux noirs peu crépus, poitrine assez plate, de taille assez grande, marchant mal. Baudelaire lui dictait quelquefois ses vers'. Cited in Eugène Crépet, 55.

négresse pour de vrai, une mulâtresse tout au moins, incontestable: le blanc écrasé à paquets n'arrive pas à pâlir le cuivre du visage, du cou, des mains.'[327] Again, we are struck here by the doubt and ambiguity that belie his emphatic certainty. First, she is not only a *négresse* but an honest to goodness one, *une négresse pour de vrai*. Nadar then affirms that at the very least she is a *mulâtresse*. Now he seems not to be too sure about her race despite his supposed conviction. And are not *négresse* and *mulâtresse* practically equivalent to him? Even if, in fact, we are not sure *what* she is, we know she is not white. This would seem to be enough for Nadar to make either term equally applicable.

Through the mechanism of an imaginary conversation between his friend and himself, Nadar is able to peruse the body of Jeanne at his leisure. His 'confrère' narrates with an abundance of anatomic details the pleasure that exists in tasting the charms of Jeanne. He contradicts the standing prejudice against the scent of women of colour. He discusses at length the different colourations of Jeanne's pigmentation, comparing her palms and the soles of her feet with the rest of her body.

> Passant aux détails, notre émérite praticien, sa vie entière étant là, se complaisait à consigner et développer chaque spécification avec précision de procès-verbal en un état de lieux: tel le chirurgien professeur didactiquement stipule les divers états d'un cas. Et comme chez nous dès lors le terme parlé devançait net et ferme la littérature dite naturaliste, je fus crûment mis au courant de tout et du reste, comme à une exhibition anatomique…[328]

With the precision of an anatomist or surgeon, his 'friend' revels in the dissection and exhibition of Jeanne's body parts. She is dismantled and judged before the reader's eyes: her hips are a bit narrow but her breasts are magnificent. Just as with Sue, we witness the simultaneity of the naturalist and erotic eye upon the exhibited

[327] Nadar, 6-7.
[328] Ibid. 17-18.

body of the *métisse*. Just as with Zola, the scientific scopophilia present in the portrait of the *métisse* demonstrates a taste for the piquant behind the positivist. Who better to gaze with impunity upon the proffered coloured female body than the scientist or the surgeon? And furthermore, who better to take on the role of 'expert' in his written account for the benefit of the reader? The display of 'la belle sauvage' is reminiscent of the early nineteenth-century exhibition of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoi Khoi woman, who was known as the 'Hottentot Venus'. Her body was exhibited in London and Paris because of its particularly bulbous buttocks and mythically large genitalia. Brought to Paris in 1814, she was displayed at the *Jardin des plantes* and other arenas as an exotic monstrosity. She died a year later at the age of twenty-five. Georges Cuvier displayed a plaster of her body, her brain, genitals and skeleton at the *Musée de l'homme* to demonstrate the racial inferiority of Africans. Her body was finally taken off display in 1974.[329]

In both of these cases, we see an uncanny relationship between exhibition and textuality. How different are Nadar and Cuvier in their appropriation and presentation of Saartjie and Jeanne? Both processes render the subject passive; she becomes an object to be observed, interpreted, and written about (or displayed). In the process of textualising the *métisse*, the author becomes a quasi-curator, who fashions the stage upon which his creation will be exhibited. I would argue that in the exhibition of Saartjie Baartman, the opposite was also true – her 'curators' became authors of her objectification. Both Saartjie and Jeanne become, through the process of their 'exhibition' – and the subsequent 're-readings' – caricaturised, racialised 'Venuses'. Volition and voice are denied these women who are both reduced to living stereotype. Fixed indelibly in print – either in 'scientific' or 'biographical' texts – these women become static reflections of the volition and voice of their authors. Symbols of racial alterity, they function equally well as scientific and erotic objects of perusal. Just like Prince Rodolphe's Cecily, these

[329] Refer to Sharpley-Whiting's *Black Venus*, 32-41, for an excellent discussion of the 'Hottentot Venus' in the context of nineteenth-century French literature and popular culture.

women's bodies are not their own; they have become the property of their authors, as well as of their spectators and readers.

Despite the undeniable racialist assumptions built into the portraits that both Banville and Nadar paint of Jeanne, both affirm that she was a beautiful woman beloved by Baudelaire. Nadar describes her personality as 'tout cela sérieux, fier, un peu dédaigneux'.[330] Banville claims in his *Souvenirs* that Baudelaire only loved one woman – Jeanne – of whom he sang magnificently in his poetry.[331] These accounts by two of Baudelaire's closest friends are contradicted in practically every subsequent representation. The same language, the same condemnations resound in succeeding portraits of Jeanne as we can see in the following citations ranging from the 1900s to the 1970s:

> Jeanne Duval…n'avait, à part sa race, rien de remarquable: ni le talent, ni la beauté, ni l'esprit, ni le cœur. […] Jeanne, qui avait, comme beaucoup de femmes de sa race, la passion des liqueurs fortes, s'y est livrée, dès sa jeunesse, avec tant d'emportement qu'elle fut, jeune encore, frappée de paralysie.[332]

This citation from Eugène Crépet, originally published in 1906, is repeated by his son, Jacques Crépet in a 1922 critical edition of Baudelaire's complete works:

> Ce qui est certain, c'est qu'elle [Jeanne] réunissait en sa personne l'universalité des vices communs aux métis: libertine, sournoise, menteuse, dépensière, alcoolique, – stupide par surcroît.[333]

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[330] Nadar, 7.

[331] This claim is given added weight by a letter written by Apollonie Sabatier to Baudelaire in 1857 in which she acknowledges a rival with whom she cannot compete: '…ma colère était bien légitime. Que dois-je penser quand je te vois fuir mes caresses, si ce n'est que tu penses à l'autre, dont l'âme et la face noires viennent se placer entre nous ? Enfin je me sens humiliée et abaissée.' W.T. Bandy et Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire devant ses contemporains* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 1957) 124-25.

[332] Eugène Crépet, 54-55; 57-58.

[333] Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire,* ed. Jacques Crépet (Paris: Louis Conard, 1922), xxix.

This is remarkably similar to Camille Mauclair's 1926 observation:

> Un vrai corps de prostituée vicieuse et insatiable, de bête à luxure, ayant tout connu, tout osé, surmonté d'une face indolente et rusée. L'esprit? Néant. Le cœur? Néant. Voilà de qui s'éprit le dandy poète.[334]

Pascal Pia, like Banville, writes of her in 1952 as a representative *métisse*, but he adjusts the stereotypical attributes to present a purely derogatory portrait, albeit equally sexual:

> Jeanne Duval présentait tous les défauts que l'on dit être ceux des métisses. Sournoise, menteuse, débauchée, dépensière, alcoolique, et par surcroît ignorante et stupide, elle se fût peut-être trouvée mieux à sa place dans le monde de la prostitution que dans la compagnie des artistes.[335]

As late as 1977, A.E. Carter denounces Jeanne, again using surprisingly similar terms as those used against her over fifty years before.

> Thanks to this fact a mendacious slut like Jeanne now occupies an unrivalled niche in literature and holds it on her own terms – as a strumpet pure and simple. […] Jeanne represented pure sex. [336]

> Like most whores she was rather pathetic: mentally retarded, slow on the uptake, content to dwell from day to day, tolerant of her queer poet provided that he paid the bills and she could occasionally get to bed with some lusty brute whose loins were stronger and his desires less finicky.[337]

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[334] Camille Mauclair, *La vie amoureuse de Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Editions Flammarion, 1927) 65; cited in Richon, 107.
[335] Pascal Pia, 'Baudelaire par lui-même', *Ecrivains de toujours* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952) 43.
[336] A.E. Carter, *Charles Baudelaire* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1977) 64.
[337] Ibid. 70.

What we notice about all of these portraits is that they define Jeanne according to type. She possesses the general qualities of a *métisse*. Carter calls her a whore and then bestows upon her his version of whorish characteristics. Leitmotivs begin to surface as we survey the accounts of Jeanne: an overactive libido, alcoholism, and attractiveness bordering on sorcery, brutish irrationality, and a penchant for spending money.[338] Nothing is originally hers; all these qualities are a product of her race/background, as the writers acknowledge. Jeanne has become a caricature, a *mélange* of racist stereotypes that all serve to minimise her importance to the poet and perhaps to his work. Richon writes that the legend of Jeanne was created little by little, every contribution further plunging Jeanne into triviality and irremediably placing her in a position of inferiority with her poet partner.[339] Indeed, not only do biographers and critics wish to deny any unique identity to Jeanne, they also wish to deny her importance to the poet both romantically and creatively.

> Souvent on s'est demandé quelle influence cette terrible femme avait exercée sur son amant! Pour beaucoup de Baudelairiens, la Vénus noire a été la muse fatale du poète. Que n'eût-il pas accompli sans elle![340]

Eugène Crépet similarly argues that Jeanne was a constant impediment ('elle eut, sans nul doute, une influence funeste sur la vie de son amant…') to the poet's

[338] This last accusation is refuted both by Nadar and Baudelaire. Nadar writes that 'elle n'entendait accepter rien, sous quelque forme que ce fût…En se donnant, elle donnait, mais elle ne recevait pas. […] Au restaurant même, si on y allait, chacun son écot.' Nadar, 20-23. Similarly, in a letter to M. Ancelle (10 January 1850), Baudelaire writes, 'J'abandonne à Jeanne 50 fr. pour sa toilette. Elle est chargée de nous faire vivre avec 150 fr. […] Il est impossible de dépenser inutilement cet argent, et d'ailleurs Jeanne qui est *comme toutes les femmes plus qu'économe*, est intéressée à me surveiller'. *Correspondance générale*, 1: 120-21. It would seem, in fact, that Baudelaire depended upon Jeanne's good financial sense. Moreover, it could be inferred from another of his letters and from his *Carnet*, that he occasionally owed Jeanne money. 'Je lui ai mangé deux fois ses bijoux et ses meubles, je lui ai fait faire des dettes pour moi, souscrire des billets, je l'ai assommée, et finalement, au lieu de lui montrer comment se conduit un homme comme moi, je lui ai toujours donné l'exemple de la débauche et de la vie errante.' Letter from Baudelaire to Mme Aupick (26 March 1853) Ibid. 194.

[339] Richon, 127-28.

[340] Alphonse Séché and Jules Bertaut, *La vie anecdotique et pittoresque des Grands Écrivains: Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Editions Louis Michaud, 1910) 126.

work.[341] Félix Gautier writes that Jeanne was Baudelaire's life mistress out of habit, and not for a minute, despite what he may have believed, did she occupy the least place in his heart. While she may have inspired him, it was a distant and indirect inspiration.[342] However, Charles Asselineau and Ernest Prarond, both of whom were close friends of the poet, assert that almost all of the poems destined for *Les Fleurs du Mal* were written by 1843-44, the presumed height of the love affair between Jeanne and Baudelaire. Far from an impediment to his poetic creations, she seems to have been an inspirational force. In addition, it is possible that she was involved in the process of writing. Ernest Prarond writes, 'Baudelaire lui dictait quelques fois, m'a-t-il dit, les vers qu'il craignait d'oublier, – *Une Charogne* peut-être ou *De Profundis clamavi! – Son orthographe est simple*, ajouta-t-il, *mais elle enrichit mes rimes*!'[343] Far from a lethal force or an unfortunate hindrance, Jeanne may well have played a more creative and constructive role as *destinatrice,* transcriber, and first listener.

La femme sans nom becomes the *Vénus noire*

Jeanne is presented to us as a woman unmoored from her roots, her name, her unique self. We catch glimpses of her through the lenses of the men whose lives she touched. And as we have seen, especially with Nadar's portrait, the lens can be clouded by tendencies to objectify, exhibit, dissect, and eroticise her body. Jeanne exists without a recorded personal history; she is a coloured canvas upon which stereotypes of race and sexuality are inscribed. Jeanne is a body, a body immortalised by the likes of Nadar and Banville and, of course, Baudelaire. Without a name (or personal identity), she is all the more easily co-opted by biographers and critics into the role of 'Vénus noire'. While the origin of the title, 'Vénus noire' is unknown, it is certain that the epithet was adopted by literary

[341] Eugène Crépet, 62. In fact, this observation seems to be based purely upon Baudelaire's emotional letter to his mother on 27 March 1852 during one of the couple's temporary separations.
[342] Félix Gautier, *Charles Baudelaire* (Bruxelles: Editions Edmond Deman, 1904) xxi-xxiii.
[343] Letter from Ernest Prarond to Jacques Crépet, dated 1886, cited in Richon, 56-57.

critics by the end of the nineteenth century to identify particular poems from Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* that were supposedly inspired by Jeanne.[344] These poems primarily focus on the physical relations between the speaker and his lover. They are called alternatively 'le cycle de l'amour charnel'. The implicit equation of Jeanne as the 'Vénus noire' demonstrates an underlying tendency toward stereotype that places upon an individual woman of mixed (or rather, unknown) racial origin all of the racial qualities associated with blackness. She will become the supreme incarnation of carnality, debauchery, and vice.

Questioning the Muses

Baudelaire was responsible for the order of his poems for publication. All critics believe that the placement of the poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal* is meaningful. The oft-cited argument in favour of privileging structure in *Les Fleurs du Mal* was first put forward by Barbey d'Aurevilly in an article for *Le Pays* in 1857 and was included in Baudelaire's defence at his obscenity trial. He writes of an 'architecture secrète' that privileges the unified whole before the individual poems, each of which contributes to the overall meaning according to its placement and interaction with the surrounding poems. 'Elles sont moins des poésies qu'une œuvre poétique *de la plus forte unité*. Au point de vue de l'Art et de la sensation esthétique, elles perdraient donc beaucoup à n'être pas lues dans l'ordre où le poète, qui sait bien ce qu'il fait, les a rangées.'[345]

With the notion of a 'secret architecture' structuring the positioning of the poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and thus providing a sense of thematic unity to the collection, came the conception of a cycle structure that would divide the *Spleen et Idéal* love poems into groupings according to the woman who supposedly inspired them, and the type of love that these women represent. Following the 'cycle de la

[344] The first example I have been able to find of the term used in relation to Jeanne is in a letter to Charles Asselineau from Mme Aupick, dated 24 March 1868, cited above.
[345] Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Marcel Ruff (Paris: Éditions du Seuil: 1968) 418-19.

Vénus noire', supposedly dedicated to Jeanne, is a group of poems that fall into the 'cycle de la Vénus blanche', supposedly dedicated to Madame Sabatier. These two cycles are alternatively called 'le cycle de l'amour charnel' and 'le cycle de l'amour spirituel'.[346] The third cycle is attributed to Marie Daubrun, although it tends to be more problematical to attribute all of those poems to her. After the 'Marie cycle', there is a series of poems dedicated to secondary women, several of whom are actually named in the poems. Critics have been unable to determine a coherent theme or title for this grouping of poems. The focus of most critical exegeses of the love poems in *Spleen et Idéal* is upon the dramatic contrast between the 'Vénus noire' and the 'Vénus blanche'. The photonegative Venuses embody racial dichotomy. They represent the poles of carnality and spirituality, evil and good, black and white, while at the same time they are meant to represent two specific women in Baudelaire's love life. Referents of the real and the ideal, the 'black' and 'white Venus' serve as ostensible poetic figures that are made all the more powerful because they allegedly exist in reality.

> De la vie amoureuse de Baudelaire, on pourrait faire deux parts: la première entièrement occupée par sa passion pour l'étrange et perverse Jeanne Duval, la Vénus noire, la seconde réservée à sa romanesque aventure avec cette femme délicieuse qui avait nom Mme. Sabatier. Ce sont deux pôles extrêmes! Un amateur d'antithèses dirait romantiquement de l'une, ce fut la personnification du Mal; de l'autre, elle fut la Bonté et la Beauté. L'opposition de la luxure et de l'amour.[347]

Rarely questioned or even acknowledged as the brainchild of a critic rather than the poet, the cycle structure has surpassed its role as critical tool and has been incorporated into the very essence of the poems. As far as I have been able to

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[346] Marcel Ruff prefers these appellations because he questions whether these two women were necessarily the sole inspirational forces behind their supposed cycles. *Baudelaire: l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Hatier-Boivin, 1955) 107-8. 'Il est certain en effet que toutes les pièces n'y ont pas été inspirées par la mulâtresse. […] Il sera plus intéressant maintainent d'oublier les questions de personnes et d'étudier l'ensemble tel que Baudelaire l'a composé.'

[347] Alphonse Séché, and Jules Bertaut, 118.

ascertain, the bestowal of certain poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* upon Jeanne first occurred in an 1895 article published by the prince Alexandre Ourousof.[348] In the article, Ourousof determines that the love poems featured in the *Spleen et Idéal* section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* were all inspired by particular muses, women with whom Baudelaire was intimate. He focuses primarily upon Jeanne and the cycle of poems he suggests are dedicated to her: 'Les Bijoux', 'Parfum exotique', 'La Chevelure', 'Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne', 'Tu mettrais l'univers entier dans ta ruelle', 'Sed non satiata', 'Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés', 'Le serpent qui danse', 'Le Vampire', 'Le Léthé', 'Remords posthume', 'Le Chat', 'Le Balcon', 'Je te donne ces vers', 'Duellum', 'Un Fantôme', and 'Chanson d'après-midi'. Using the following criteria, Ourosof determines if a poem does or does not belong to the 'Jeanne cycle': evocative odour, dark skin colour, black hair, black eyes, indolent movement, and the placement of the poem in the work.[349] He writes that poems addressed to a woman of blue, grey, or green eyes permit us to establish that they are *not* part of the 'Jeanne cycle'. In the case of 'Je te donne ces vers', Ourousof argues for its inclusion in the 'Jeanne cycle' based upon a reference to black eyes. Colour (be it of hair, skin, or eyes) seems to be a conclusive indicator for muse attribution. Black, according to Ourousof equals Jeanne. However, several poems enter his cycle that do not necessarily fit these conditions, for example, 'Tu mettrais l'univers entier dans ta ruelle'. Ourousof's argument for inclusion is that the disastrous love evoked in the poem bespeaks that of Baudelaire and Jeanne. Similarly, 'Le Vampire' is included in the 'Jeanne cycle' because it reflects, with its concurrent ecstasy and imprecation, the relationship between Baudelaire and Jeanne. He also suggests the possibility that 'Une Charogne' be included in the cycle partly because of its links to 'Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne'. Jacques Crépet will later support the inclusion of the 'Je t'adore à l'égal de la voûte nocturne' in the 'Jeanne cycle' because 'on sait que les

[348] Alexandre Ourousof, 'Commentaire et Variantes', *Le Tombeau de Baudelaire*, ed. Stéphane Mallarmé (Paris: Bibliothèque Artistique et Littéraire, 1896; reprint New York, AMS Press, 1979) 21-35.
[349] Ibid. 23.

fantaisies de la belle mulâtresse ne chômaient pas et que son amant en souffrit cruellement'.[350] Thus, it would seem that evocations of cursed love and blackness are the two fundamental criteria required to implicate Jeanne in the poems. Jeanne is not just a racialised figure but also a symbol of disastrous love.

The cycle structure that divides the *Spleen et Idéal* love poems into groupings according to the woman who inspired them is unquestioned by most critics and biographers. Richon and F.W. Leakey are two of a small number of critics that query the rigid, oppositional nature of the cycle system. Richon suggests that the cycle structure inhibits imaginative and critical analysis by the inflexible precedence it places upon the contextual situation of a poem rather than upon its content. He argues that this type of reading severely limits the role of Jeanne Duval who, Richon believes, is at the centre of most of the project and certainly exceeds her designated cycle.[351]

Leakey, in an essay entitled, 'Poet or "Architect"?', dismisses the pre-eminence of the 'secret architecture' theory in Baudelairean studies. He questions it upon documentary grounds, arguing that there is no evidence that Baudelaire refers to *Les Fleurs du Mal* as being ordered according to a collective theme running through it. Rather, Baudelaire's interest was that the work would be judged in its entirety, as no 'mere album' but a book with a beginning and end. It is generally acknowledged that the majority of the poems that would be selected for *Les Fleurs du Mal* were already written by 1843-44. When in 1857, Baudelaire prepares to publish these poems, Leakey argues that it is not so much an architect building an *oeuvre* as a painter arranging 'a belated one-man show of work that was largely

[350] Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Jacques Crépet, 420.
[351] Richon, 55-59. Richon argues that 'L'Amour du Mensonge', 'La Géante', 'Danse macabre', 'Le Monstre', 'Les petites Vieilles', 'Le Beau Navire', and 'L'Invitation au voyage' are all part of the 'Jeanne cycle'. These inclusions demonstrate, in his opinion, the futility of the cycle system because the pre-eminence of Jeanne renders it useless. Ibid. 75.

accomplished in his youth'.[352] Referring to a letter from Baudelaire to his publisher, Leakey notes the emphasis on selection and not arrangement. Further, Leakey directs us to an article by one of Baudelaire's closest friends, Charles Asselineau, published in 1857 (and thus contemporary to that of Barbey d'Aurevilly) in which the author emphasises the 'fragmentary nature' of the collection.[353] If Baudelaire did stress the unity of his book, it could have been in an effort to defend it against the charges of immorality. 'Le Livre doit être jugé dans son ensemble, et alors il en ressort une terrible moralité.'[354] In this protest, Baudelaire attempts to deny the detachment and condemnation of individual poems, arguing that it is in the totality of the work that meaning can be found, and not on the basis of isolated poems.

In all, Leakey suggests that we view the composition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* 'not as some monumental conception imposed from without, but rather as a feat of empirical organisation that in no way infringes the separate entity and autonomy of individual poems'. He adds that 'we must not feel obligated to petrify the whole of Baudelaire's achievement into two single moments represented by the 1857 and the 1861 editions'.[355] Nevertheless, the myth of the 'architecture secrète' has gained such currency, that it has become almost impossible to view the love poems found in *Spleen et Idéal* through another lens. Richon rightly refers to this phenomenon as critique turned dogma. Most, if not all, subsequent critics will uphold Barbey d'Aurevilly's emphasis on the sequential order of the poems.

Not only is the inception of the 'Jeanne cycle' founded upon a kind of simplistic racial typology, it is also subject to contention and dispute by critics. I wish to study the ongoing debate surrounding the cycles and question attribution by taking

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[352] F.W. Leakey, 'Poet or "Architect"?' *Baudelaire: Collected Essays: 1953-1988*, ed. Eva Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 62-63.
[353] Ibid. 67.
[354] Cited in Leakey, 64.
[355] Ibid. 68.

a look at the work of the eminent Baudelaire scholars, Eugène and Jacques Crépet, with regard to their appraisal of the 'Jeanne' poems. Jacques Crépet's extensive and highly esteemed work on Baudelaire, in particular, spans the first half of the twentieth century. His prolificacy makes him an interesting object of study: his updated notes accompanying each new critical edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* record the inconstancy of the cycle system. We see Crépet re-evaluate cycle content in his 1922 and 1942 critical editions of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, as well as his 1957 *Propos sur Baudelaire*. Eugène Crépet, in his *Étude biographique* mentions and supports Ourousof's splicing of poems, however he makes several modifications to the list:

> Bien qu'aucun document ne l'autorise en toute certitude, ce groupement me paraît parfaitement justifié. Mais pour ma part je rangerais encore, parmi les pièces écrites pour Jeanne ou sous son influence: *Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse juive* (auprès de Sarah, Baudelaire pense à Jeanne qui, fort coquette et aimant ailleurs, se fait désirer); *Le Beau navire* (M. Ourousof écarte cette pièce parce qu'il y est question d'une 'gorge triomphante', tandis que, dans *Les Bijoux*, Jeanne *a le buste d'un imberbe.* L'objection ne me semble pas tenir contre tant d'autres arguments résultant des images qu'y emploie le poète et avec lesquelles il nous a déjà peint sa maîtresse); *L'Invitation au voyage*, et, peut-être, *La Béatrice*.[356]

Jacques Crépet will later rescind several of these additions.

While it has been a general rule of thumb that the *Spleen et Idéal* poems form three major blocks dedicated to three particular women, as I have already mentioned, this is not as straightforward as it seems. First of all, within the Jeanne block of poems many critics would argue that at least two are dedicated to Sarah, a Jewish woman with whom Baudelaire is meant to have had an affair before his 1841 trip destined for India. Some (like Crépet) suggest that at least 'Chanson d'après-midi', found in the 'Marie cycle' really belongs to Jeanne. Certainly, there has been

[356] Eugène Crépet, 62-3.

controversy surrounding the attribution of 'Le Beau navire', 'L'Invitation au voyage' and others. Ernest Prarond, a friend of Baudelaire, was primarily responsible for dating the poems. According to him, the poem, 'Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse juive', was not written for Jeanne, as Ourousof, Eugène Crépet, and others originally thought.[357] Instead, he argues that it was written as early as 1841 before Baudelaire is supposed to have met Jeanne. He attributes it, rather, to Sarah, dubbed *La Louchette* and sometimes referred to as a prostitute. In addition, 'Tu mettrais l'univers entier dans ta ruelle', again originally thought to be inspired by Jeanne, is reattributed to Sarah. Since one of the major arguments in favour of the cycle system is that Baudelaire dedicated poems to each muse in a kind of serial form, any contradiction of that series would undermine the system, itself. However, instead of calling the cycle into question, what has happened is that these poems, both of which paint portraits of impure women whose sexual depravity and physical corruption intrigue and disgust the speaker, have provided added ammunition to the portrayal of the 'real' Jeanne as the sum of all carnality. Despite the fact that these two poems no longer 'belong' to Jeanne, they still implicate her by their geographical proximity to poems that *do* 'belong' to her. She is found guilty by association.

Likewise, we encounter ambivalence when it comes to attributing the poems that are ostensibly part of the 'Marie cycle'. Eugène Crépet argues in 1906 that many of the images in the 'Le Beau navire' correspond with the general portrait of Jeanne, particularly her 'gorge triomphante'.[358] While Jacques Crépet emphatically agrees with his father's assessment in 1922, he will reattribute it to Marie Daubrun in 1942. Likewise, in 1942, Jacques Crépet recants his 1922 suggestion that Jeanne is at the heart of 'L'Invitation au voyage' because she evokes the speaker's nostalgia for a far away place due to her exotic origins. One of the primary reasons for the change is simply a matter of proximity: the poem falls geographically

[357] J. Crépet attributes it to Jeanne in his 1922 edition and rescinds this statement in 1942.
[358] This image recalls a description by Nadar in which he likens Jeanne's chest to a branch heavily laden with fruits. Nadar, 7-8.

within the 'Marie cycle'.[359] However, Crépet does not maintain a geographically purist position when he argues for the inclusion of 'Chanson d'après-midi' in the 'Jeanne cycle'. He suggests that while the poem may fall within the 'Marie cycle', its imagery bears an unequivocal resemblance to 'Sed non satiata', 'Parfum exotique', and 'La Chevelure'. He also proposes that the 'nymphe ténébreuse' of the poem can hardly refer to the blond Marie but rather refers to the dark Jeanne.[360] The differences between the 1922 and 1942 editions illuminate the occasionally incoherent and contentious cycle system debate: it is hardly self-evident or indisputable. As Eugène Crépet acknowledges, there is no document that authorises these structural decisions made on the part of the reader-critic. Baudelaire never names the supposed principal muses in his love poems. No biographical evidence is provided in the poems to suggest a one-to-one relationship between the female object of a poem and a physical woman. Mario Richter sums up this argument very well when he writes:

> Si Baudelaire avait voulu mettre en évidence d'éventuelles divisions ou d'éventuelles cycles, il l'aurait sûrement fait. En réalité, les textes de la section que nous sommes en train de lire s'alignent dans une succession numérique, sans autre indication de rapport majeur ou mineur que le titre ou l'absence de titre. Pour quelle raison trouve-t-on, dans le 'cycle' de la femme exotique, un poème comme XXIX [Une Charogne] ? […] De la même façon, les femmes ne s'excluent pas l'une l'autre. Elles peuvent se superposer, se croiser, se confondre, apparaître, disapparaître, réapparaître.[361]

The uncertainties mentioned cast doubt over the entire attribution of muses at the heart of the cycle system. How are we meant to read poems that fall within a

[359] Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal, texte de la séconde edition suivi des pièces supprimés en 1857 et des additions de 1868*, ed. Jacques Crépet et Georges Blin, (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1942) 387.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Mario Richter, 379-80.

particular cycle but do not seem to be *of* the cycle? For instance, how do we reconcile the supposed 'Sarah poems' with the ostensible 'Jeanne poems' or with the alleged 'Marie poems'? If these poems are meant to portray particular women in Baudelaire's life, what happens when the critics change their mind about which woman is portrayed? I propose that there is a residual association that lingers even after attribution has been re-established. While certain biographers and critics now may deem 'Tu mettrais l'univers dans ta ruelle' to be about Sarah, it still rests within the 'Jeanne Duval/black Venus cycle'. Jeanne remains guilty by proximity. One could argue that 'la Louchette' and 'la Vénus noire' serve the same function. Each epithet refers to a woman on the fringes of society; a supposed prostitute of improper race whose embodied deviance (Sarah is a squinting Jewess and Jeanne is black carnality incarnate) provides the necessary basis for caricature and demonisation.

Marcel Ruff and D. J. Mossop have both questioned the efficacy of a bio-literary approach to an exegesis of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and turn instead to a primarily structural analysis.[362] Ruff writes that it is more appropriate to call the 'Jeanne cycle' the 'cycle de l'amour charnel' because he reasons that not all of the poems in the said cycle are dedicated to the *métisse*. The 'cycle de la Vénus blanche' is renamed the 'cycle de l'amour spirituel ou platonique'.[363] Ruff and Mossop both deem the moral of the *oeuvre* to be the simultaneous postulations toward God (idéal) and Satan (spleen). The speaker moves between these two emotional poles in his experiences with Woman. The speaker is introduced to carnality through the 'Vénus noire' whose sexuality is both attractive and repulsive to him. His

[362] 'However outmoded the idea may be in poetic theory, it has not proved easy to avoid the dangers of the Romantic assumption that a lyric poem is a sincere personal confession. The 'Je' or 'Poète' of the poems is thought to be necessarily Baudelaire, Baudelaire as he was at a moment or a period of his life, which is not always specified. Nor has it always been thought necessary to adduce more evidence than the poems, themselves, which are credited with the dual power to explain the man in terms of the work and the work in terms of the man.' D.J. Mossop, *Baudelaire's Tragic Hero: A Study of the Architecture of 'Les Fleurs du Mal';* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) 5.

[363] Marcel A. Ruff, *Baudelaire: L'homme et l'œuvre*, 107.

relationship with her brings his ruin as a man just as it leads to his poetic greatness.[364] Here we return again to the paradoxical conception of the (artistic) fruitfulness of degenerative relations with a coloured woman, as seen in Gobineau and Zola's writings. In *Spleen et Idéal*, the speaker attempts to alleviate his distress in the platonic love of the 'Vénus blanche', while fully cognisant of the futility of this endeavour.[365] I suggest that instead of loosening the connection between alleged muse and a structural type of love, there has been rather a further underscoring of Jeanne as the sum of all carnality. She has not receded from view but rather has been incorporated further into the body of the poems. A demonised Jeanne, a figure of unequivocal sexuality and depravity, is a floating signifier hovering above most of the poems illustrating carnal love. While it must be acknowledged that there does seem to be a preponderance of references to night, darkness, etc. in the 'cycle de l'amour charnel' and of references to lightness in the 'cycle de l'amour spirituel', the continued employment of terms 'black' and 'white' Venus (even if they are no longer tied to real women) maintains a racialisation of character and kinds of love that may not necessarily be implied by the text. By upholding the cycle system – be it according to muse or to colour – the divide between black as venal and white as spiritual is maintained. In the case of the black and white Venuses, we distinguish between them by placing them in opposition to one another. Both are empty canvases upon which we paint all that the other *is not*. This Manichean system of binaries is the only way to write about a photonegative Venus who is an embodiment of opposites. Marc Eigeldinger writes of the two cycles as follows:

> C'est le cycle [de Jeanne] des poèmes nocturnes, élaborés sous le signe de la lune, de l'épaisseur des ténèbres qui symbolisent le désordre de la matière et du plaisir charnel. De l'autre côté le cycle d'Apollonie Sabatier – et parfois aussi celui de Marie Daubrun – célèbre l'amour-vertu, l'exaltation spirituelle, la purification de l'âme, la femme angélique,

[364] Mossop, 30. This tragic paradox in reminiscent of Zola's characterisation of Laurent.
[365] Mossop mentions the repeated reference to 'songe' and 'mensonge' in this cycle.

> éternel luminaire et constellation de la Beauté. Il est construit sur des images d'aube et de clarté, dominé par les thèmes de l'harmonie et du rayonnement solaire, par l'éclat bienfaisant du souvenir.[366]

The *blackness* of the 'cycle de la Vénus noire', according to Eigeldinger, seems to refer to all that is nocturnal, chaotic and carnal. In contrast, the *whiteness* of the 'cycle de la Vénus blanche' seems to refer to all that is angelic, pure, and spiritual. Light brings beauty; darkness, dangerous disorder.[367] Rather than leave the poetic analysis purely on the level of colour as an indicator of mood and tone – which still provides fruitful avenues of inquiry regarding Baudelaire's representation of blackness, race, and the exotic – Eigeldinger and most critics make the fateful step of personifying the black and white. I suggest that the 'Vénus noire' has the more 'powerful' effect upon the reader *because* of her darkness, her anonymity. While the 'Vénus blanche', a symbol of clarity, is modelled on Apollonie Sabatier, a woman whose identity and life story are known; the 'Vénus noire', modelled on Jeanne, remains a mystery. Jeanne/the black Venus is the most immaterial of figures (historical or poetic). As we have seen with Jeanne, it is in the absence of a history or even of a name that creative appellations and stories are born. Marcel Ruff in *L'Esprit du mal et l'esthétique baudelairienne* addresses the accepted assumption of Jeanne as the incarnation of *Mal*. He rightly acknowledges that the label of 'Vénus noire' attached to Jeanne does not relate to physical reality. 'Avec Jeanne Duval, on pensera que c'est le malheur qui entre dans la vie de Baudelaire. Il semble que la couleur même de la "Vénus noire" ait quelque chose de sinistre qui assombrit sa personnalité. Cette couleur, on le sait, était loin de correspondre à l'épithète, mais ce détail ne nous intéresse pas ici.'[368]

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[366] Marc Eigeldinger, *Le platonisme de Baudelaire* (Neuchâtel: La Balconnière, 1951) 46.
[367] See Miller's examination of Baudelaire's references to the colour black, 71-87.
[368] Marcel Ruff, *L'Esprit du mal et l'esthétique baudelairienne* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1955) 187.

If one were to peruse the 'cycle de la Vénus noire', such as it is generally accepted by critics, for examples of a 'coloured' lover/muse, one would be hard-pressed to find very many. Of the twenty-one poems in the cycle (including 'Les Bijoux' and 'Le Léthé', both of which were condemned and taken out of the second edition), only seven make reference specifically to blackness or more generally to colour that *could* be associated with Jeanne. 'Sed non satiata': '*Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits*',[369] '*Sorcière au flanc d'ébène, enfant des noirs minuits*'; 'Remords posthume': '*Ma belle ténébreuse*'; 'Un Fantôme': '*C'est Elle! sombre et pourtant lumineuse*', '*Noire assassin de la Vie et de l'Art*'; 'Je te donne ces vers afin que si mon nom': '*Statue aux yeux de jais, grand ange au front d'airain*'; 'Les Bijoux': '*Cette peau couleur d'ambre*'; 'Le Léthé': '*Sur ton beau corps poli comme le cuivre*'. While three of these references seem to be concerned with pigmentation, most stress the shadowy nature of the woman. Her darkness, particularly in 'Un Fantôme' could be an acknowledgement not of her race but of her ambiguity; her indistinctness is underscored by her *sombre* but *lumineuse* nature. If, indeed, Baudelaire's intention was to represent *La Femme* as a double postulation toward spiritual aspiration and sexual regression, then there is no need for the biographical component to the poems. They stand on their own as articulations of Baudelaire's veneration and disdain of Woman; they demonstrate his desire for and aversion toward (physical or spiritual) intimacy. This duality of spirit reflects a theme of ambivalence that runs through much of Baudelaire's work and certainly is a cornerstone of his vision of women. The *belle ténébreuse* in 'Remords posthume' encapsulates this indistinctness; here is a woman who appears to the reader blurry, ambiguous, and vague. A dominant emphasis on race runs the risk of limiting the poems to a particular biographical referent rather than suggesting other avenues of reading that would connect the poem to a larger thematic context beyond Jeanne.

[369] While *brune* generally refers to hair colour, in the context of the poem, it seems conceivable that the speaker is actually referring to skin colour, according to Christopher Miller, 100-01.

Another Reading

There is, however, no question that Baudelaire turns to conventional themes regarding race and the exotic. In his effort to depict Woman as the fount of memory and imagination, as well as a supremely dangerous and erotic intoxicant, Baudelaire uses literary conventions that tap into discourses on race and exoticism. As he writes in *Fusées*, 'Nous aimons les femmes à proportion qu'elles nous sont plus étrangères'. The artist and the man look to woman as a symbol of alterity, as a 'stupid' idol whose importance rests in her function of stirring the contemplation of the male mind by her fundamental difference from him.[370] 'Baudelaire cherche à se perdre en la Femme, en ce qui en elle est distincte de lui. En elle, il se "voit à l'envers."'[371] Through her, he finds a means of approaching the natural world, which both proves her essential inferiority to man but also his dependence upon her in his creation of art and understanding of himself and the world around him.

> La femme est le contraire du dandy. / Donc elle doit faire horreur. / La femme a faim et elle veut manger. Soif et / elle veut boire. / Elle est en rut et elle veut être foutue. / Le beau mérite ! / La femme est *naturelle*, c'est-à-dire abominable. / Aussi est-elle toujours vulgaire, c'est-à-dire le contraire du dandy. [372]

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[370] In 'La Femme' in his *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire writes of woman as the being 'pour qui et par qui se font et défont les fortunes; pour qui mais souvent *par qui* les artistes et les poètes composent leurs plus délicats bijoux; de qui dérivent les plaisirs les plus énervants et les douleurs les plus fécondantes, la femme, en un mot, n'est pas seulement pour l'artiste […] la femelle de l'homme. C'est plutôt une divinité, un astre, qui préside à toutes les conceptions du cerveau mâle; c'est un miroitement de toutes les grâces de la nature condensées dans un seul être; c'est l'objet de l'admiration et de curiosité la plus vive que le tableau de la vie puisse offrir au contemplateur. C'est une espèce d'idole, stupide peut-être, mais éblouissante, enchanteresse, qui tient les destinées et les volontés suspendues à ses regards'. Excerpt from *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* in *Œuvres complètes de Baudelaire*, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec (Paris: Gallimard,1954) 909-10.

[371] Bassim, 123. Citation of 'Le Poison', *Les Fleurs du Mal*, XLIX.

[372] Baudelaire, 'Mon Cœur mis à nu', III, *Journaux intimes*, ed. Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1949) 53. This passage was written considerably after *Les Fleurs du Mal* so the question could be raised as to what extent this misogynist assertion is reflected in his earlier work. I would argue that the *Spleen et Idéal* poems do articulate an often unwilling attraction

The natural woman is placed in a binary relationship with the artificial male dandy. He is an aristocrat, a sort of saint who upholds the values of artifice and self-control in the face of the violence and confusion of the natural world, of which woman is a part.[373] In his description of the anti dandy, his indictment of woman as beast of nature utilises imagery that one would generally associate with the term, *sauvage*. Her primitive, animalistic nature easily swayed by sensual desires is remarkably similar to Gobineau's description of the black race. This conflation of gender and race serves to heighten the alterity of the anti dandy from Baudelaire's ideal hero. The antithesis of the masculine and aristocratic dandy would be feminine and plebeian, both of which are conceptually linked to the black race in Gobineau's race-gender-class hierarchy. What we find throughout the *Spleen et Idéal* poems is a constant movement toward and away from Woman, who, despite her abominable naturalness, is a portal by which man/the poet can approach the infinite. The simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from the *métisse* that we have witnessed in Zola, Loti, and Gobineau, here is expanded in its reference to all women, whose natural alterity is approached through a racialist and exoticist lexicon.

In these poems that emphasise the exotic, we see several recognisable themes resurface such as the controlling gaze of the white male speaker upon the displayed body of the exotic (coloured?) woman and the reversibility of power in the master-slave dialectic. However, I will argue that Baudelaire achieves something quite distinctive through his appropriation of these themes. Instead of a naturalist or erotic eye (as we have seen in Sue, Zola, and Loti), in Baudelaire's poems we find – for want of a better word – a *poetic* eye upon the woman who becomes a vehicle

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toward the female object, who is described recurrently with animalistic references that enhance her 'naturalness' and thus her alterity from the male speaker/poet.

[373] Romana N. Lowe, *The Fictional Female: Sacrificial Rituals and Spectacles of Writing in Baudelaire, Zola, and Cocteau* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997) 21.

that enables the reveries of the poet. The exotic woman, in particular, becomes the mechanism through which the poet can go on a mental journey. Her alterity evokes memory and dreams of travel and escape. This can be seen clearly in poems such as 'La Chevelure', 'L'Invitation au voyage', and 'Parfum Exotique'. The woman becomes the conduit for inspired travel to imagined exotic locales. Whatever the shared intimacy between the speaker and the anonymous mistress, the ecstasy provided to the speaker is primarily of a poetic and not an erotic kind.

In 'La Chevelure' the hair of the poet's lover inspires reminiscences, 'des souvenirs dormants', of a remote world. This faraway world does not, however, correlate to a physical locale, nor are the poet's memories indicative of an actual past experience, despite his claims to the contrary. From the very first line, we are aware of the mythical and imaginary elements in the poem; the word *toison* is a reference to the woman's hair but also alludes to the mythological fleece, thus summoning up images of exotic voyages and quests. In the second stanza, the conflation of 'langoureuse Asie' and 'brûlante Afrique' into a single, distant, absent, and almost obsolete land denies the presence of a factual world in the speaker's reverie. Instead, it appears, through the abundance of quasi-religious images (*âme*, or, *éternelle*, *vastes*, *ciel pur*) that the speaker is in search of an ideal, eternal place where his soul can drink and rest.[374] The distant land about which the poet reminisces is an Eden created by the speaker, an imagined past, a fictional place of origin. In this sense, it is an antediluvian vision of the exotic world. Its almost defunct status links it to antiquity, to the origins of man. The woman is the poet's link to these origins. She is said to be the oasis at which he dreams and the gourd from which he drinks the wine of memory: 'N'es-tu pas l'oasis où je rêve, et la gourde/ Où je hume à longs traits le vin du souvenir?' She is fashioned to be the vehicle of his reverie and his intoxication. Her anonymity merely confirms her secondary role in his egocentric artistic process. Indeed, in many of the poems

[374] Victor Brombert, 'The Will to Ecstasy: The Example of Baudelaire's "La Chevelure."' *Charles Baudelaire*, Harold Bloom ed. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987) 31-2.

dedicated to or manifestly about women, it is the first person singular that overshadows the text.

'La Chevelure' expresses the distinction between the erotic and poetic. The lines **'**Je plongerai ma tête amoureuse d'ivresse/ Dans ce noir océan où l'autre est enfermé' clearly undercut any attempt by the reader to interpret this poem as a celebration of sensuous love. The inversion of 'amoureuse d'ivresse' disappoints our expectations because it makes intoxication, and not love, the speaker's ultimate end. This intoxication results not simply from the sexually inspiring mistress but from the speaker's will. It is his head, in love with intoxication that plunges into the woman's hair. His head may physically immerse itself in the woman's hair but more importantly, it is his mind, his 'esprit subtil' that wills itself to be intoxicated by the woman. The use of the future tense shows intent rather than simple passivity.[375] As Victor Brombert subtly argues, we see here an ambiguous relationship between intoxication, which depends upon a certain level of passivity, and volition, the active will of the artist. The artist wishes for *ivresse* and *volupté* but only if he can shape and control this *ivresse.*[376] He desires a sort of despotic domination of his dreams and his poetry. In 'Le Beau Navire' this artistic intention is articulated as early as the first line: [377] 'Je veux te raconter' and in the third line of the same stanza, 'Je veux te peindre'. This domination over his poetry translates itself into domination over the objects that inspire it, his women and his exotic visions.[378] In this sense, the eroticism that displays itself is not mutual but masturbatory. Thus, we see despotism not only in the poet's method but also in the very relationships that he establishes with the exotic. Up to this point we are on familiar ground. The poetic gaze of the speaker upon the exotic woman is firmly in control of the object of scrutiny. If there is an element of eroticism, it is mastered by the poet. However, I wish to suggest that in the poem, 'Les Bijoux', the

[375] Ibid. 31.
[376] Ibid.
[377] A poem generally attributed to Marie Daubrun, but –as we have seen – not without contention.
[378] Brombert, 32.

despotism of the speaker – witnessed in 'La Chevelure' with regard to the exotic object – seems to be directed toward its own dissolution or disruption, thus demonstrating what Georges Blin refers to as Baudelaire's sadomasochistic vision of love and sex.[379]

In 'Les Bijoux' we witness the overturning of power between male subject and coloured female object and the destabilisation of the despotic narrative voice (and eye), which open up a space for the renegotiation of power between subject and object.[380] The poem begins with a fairly standard image of an exotic nude woman likened to 'les esclaves des Mores', who poses provocatively for her white male lover and master. Richard D. E. Burton in his essay entitled, 'Poet, Painter, Lover: A Reading of "Les Bijoux"', summarises the poem's situation and subject: 'a woman, wholly naked but for her jewels, *poses*, like an artist's model, before her fascinated lover, whose rapture is at once aesthetic and erotic, without being sexual'.[381] We see here again an intrinsic voyeuristic element. According to Burton, the male speaker wishes to remain the spectator of his love interest rather than an active sexual partner. The speaker is at heart a voyeur, who studies his exotic object as one might study a work of art. Her separate polished body parts parade past his clear and detached gaze.

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[379] See Christopher Miller's analysis of 'Sed non satiata' in which he draws our attention to the ambivalent power relations between male subject and female object such that the subject in the poem is dominated by the object of his own creation (she is described as the 'oeuvre de quelque obi'). The complicity between subject and object/oeuvre articulates the complicity of the speaker in the hands of a woman whose sorcery and domination he desires ('jaillissant de mon oeil par des milliers'). Miller is aware of the instability of power whereby the speaker chooses to 'make himself subservient to the sorceress and inadequate to her demands'. And yet, as Miller points, out, the denotation of her power is undercut by lexical choices that enhance her exotic and bizarre nature: *bizarre, déité, obi, savane, sorcière,* and *caravane*, 113. While this may seem similar to the narrative voice in Sue's *roman feuilleton* that projects great homicidal power onto the body of Cecily while still maintaining strict narrative control over that body, Baudelaire actually does something much more exciting: he *shows* the exotic woman to be the *creation* of the poet, and perhaps even of the speaker who desires her.

[380] Baudelaire, 'Les Bijoux', *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ed. Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin, 169.

[381] Richard D. E. Burton, 'Poet, Painter, Lover: A Reading of "Les Bijoux"', *Understanding Les Fleurs du Mal: Critical Reading*, ed. William J. Thompson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997) 216.

> Et son bras et sa jambe, et sa cuisse et ses reins,
> Polis comme de l'huile, onduleux comme un cygne,
> Passaient devant mes yeux clairvoyants et sereins;

'Les Bijoux' begins with the poet firmly in control of his poem and his exotic female object. The amber-coloured, nude, bejeweled woman poses according to the desires of the speaker. Her passivity, however, is short-lived.

> Les yeux fixés sur moi, comme un tigre dompté,
> D'un air vague et rêveur elle essayait des poses,
> Et la candeur unie à la lubricité
> Donnait un charme neuf à ses métamorphoses.

A hint of her animalistic lubricity surfaces as she chooses her poses with a compliance that barely contains her more savage nature, much like the tamed tiger with which she is compared. Showcasing her oiled and undulating body she turns the tables on her observer whose initially untroubled gaze is jeopardised by an increasing physical desire that troubles his peaceful love with lustful urges.

> Et son ventre et ses seins, ces grappes de ma vigne,
> S'avançaient plus câlins que les anges du mal
> Pour troubler le repos où mon âme était mise

The action of the poem follows the destruction of the 'erotic-aesthetic fantasy' enjoyed by the male subject as the woman moves from object to subject, willfully eliciting unwanted sexual desire in her beloved.[382] This movement of the exotic woman from object to active sexual partner destroys the speaker's despostic voyeurism and exerts an unwanted power over him. 'She may, at the outset of the poem, be a (willing) slave to her master's erotic-exotic fantasy, but she is a slave possessed of an "air vainqueur" who will in due course assert her power over the man to whom, initially, she is, or seems to be in thrall.'[383] It is from this movement

[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid. 218.

from object to subject that Burton derives his Hegelian interpretation of a subverted Orientalist theme that echoes Robert Young's observation about the reversible sadomasochistic component implicit in Gobineau's representation of race relations.

In 'Les Bijoux', the poet-curator fashions the stage upon which the displayed exotic female body parts can be observed to greatest advantage. The passive female object poses docilely and the male subject gazes upon this living *objet d'art* with dispassion. However, the movement of the female object to subject overturns the traditional balance of power between author and creation, curator and curiosity, white male and coloured female, which was kept firmly intact in 'La Chevelure'. By inciting the speaker's lust with her stereotypical animality and lubricity, the coloured woman attains a power over him that we have seen in 'Sed non satiata' and time and time again in the other texts. Superficially, this would seem to mirror the relationship between Ferrand and Cecily. The voyeur's gaze becomes masochistic as the object of perusal controls how she is seen. However, in Sue's novel, the narrator maintains complete control over Cecily; she is a dangerous quantity, but one which is thoroughly known by the narrator and thus firmly within his command. Similarly, in Loti's novel, Cora – initially dangerous to the innocent Jean due to her ability to stir in him erotic urges – is not only unmasked by Jean but also banished from Saint-Louis and the novel. Both women are contained by the narrative and the damage they inflict is strictly curtailed by an authoritative narrator.

In contrast, in 'Les Bijoux' we find that it is the narrative voice, itself, which is troubled and loses its authority over its poetic object. The displacement of power within this textual structure renders precarious the whole system of despotic poetic intent such as it has been articulated in 'La Chevelure', in which the exotic woman is simply a means to an end, the portal through which the poet can shape his own solitary imaginative musings. In other words, the exotic object that, so far, has

served as a means of projecting the poet's volition now reclaims its power through the orchestration of its own display. Here the literary convention of wounded white male lover and coloured *femme fatale* not only themes the poem but structures it: the troubled white gaze is that of the speaker, and any loss of control on his part affects the 'narrative' as a whole. In other words, the poem is not simply *about* power reversal; it *enacts* it through the speaker's loss of control of the exotic female object, as his gaze turns from despotic to erotically perturbed. Unlike all of the other authors we have examined, Baudelaire undercuts the power of the narrative to create and control the coloured woman. The detached gaze of the poet-speaker and his wish to control his desire for the woman – not dissimilar to Zola's 'naturalism' or Sue and Loti's taxonomic imagery – cannot be maintained, and thus creates a space for the negotiation of power between subject and object. Thus, using the conventional themes of gaze and power reversal, as well as adhering to standard racialist imagery, Baudelaire does something quite unusual. He raises questions about the authority of the author; he suggests that the coloured female object is far from a static and containable entity; and he reminds us that the relationship between subject and object, between spectator and spectacle, between reader and text, is never unidirectional.

It is ironic, then, that the work of a poet who raises doubts about the unilateral power of the authorial voice over the textual object (and in particular the exotic woman) would generate just that kind of rigid, one-sided critical interpretation. 'Les Bijoux', an oft-cited poem to attest to the dangerous eroticism of Jeanne Duval, firmly entrenched in the 'cycle de la Vénus noire', actually may provide us with a better way to read the exotic in Baudelaire as a site of potential power transaction and fluidity, where the static delineations of stereotype give way to unsettling ambiguity.[384]

[384] This is by no means an exhaustive analysis of the representation of the exotic in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. My purpose in examining these two poems is to posit alternative reading patterns that would suggest a poet very much aware of the unsettling dialectical power relations he evokes in his representation of the exotic (and specifically the exotic woman).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced the mythology of Jeanne Duval, the creation of a figure simultaneously of fluidity and rigidity, ambivalence and certainty. We have seen the ease with which she is moved between races and nationalities to maintain her position of otherness. Further, I have deconstructed the historical basis of the cycle system with its emphasis on racialisation and biography. The placement of the 'black' and 'white' Venuses upon the poems is a reflection of the critics' attitudes toward race rather than the intent of the poet. The further personification of the Venuses to reflect historical individuals leads readers into a kind of circular logic whereby Jeanne's identity is substantiated by 'her poems' and the 'Vénus noire' is given a corporeal form. I have further questioned the replacement of muses with typologies of love because I argue that Jeanne still exists as a floating signifier of carnality due to the accretion of critical interpretations upon the poems. Baudelaire's emphasis on simultaneous postulations toward ideal and spleen, toward carnal and spiritual forms of love, and toward equal and opposite attractions signals an interest in ambivalence and contradiction. By colour-coding these simultaneous postulations, by forcing upon them a precise biographical component based on a racial epithet, critics have limited the meaning and power of the poems. In my very brief examination of 'La Chevelure' and 'Les Bijoux', I have tried to demonstrate another possible reading of the exotic woman (such as Baudelaire fashions her), which unsettles conventional loci of power and unhinges the traditional mechanism for stereotype – namely a static object that is denied individuality and will.

Thus, it is all the more paradoxical that the mythology of Jeanne – the 'Vénus noire' – has gathered such support and credence from over a century of critical accounts that it now seems to function as a self-evident entity, supported *only* by secondary sources. The guiding principle in any discussion of Jeanne, *une femme*

sans nom, is the simultaneous attraction to her ambiguity and an equally strong desire to categorise her in stable terms. She is an absent historical figure whose lack of a personal voice enables others to write for/of her, thus negating her individual existence. She is a *type* and nothing more. A representative *métisse, mulâtresse, négresse, indienne, prostituée, monstre*, the ambiguous Jeanne is never simply herself but is always given an appellation that is meant to fix upon her a sense of stability. This is the process of stereotype. The 'Vénus noire', a figure who will come to embody all that is carnal and immoral is placed upon a practically anonymous woman. Her identity is fixed as a poetic figure, a myth created by readers who pull from the darkness their own fears and desires.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined fictional representations of the *métisse*, as well as the fictionalisation of an historical woman deemed to be a *métisse*, to determine this figure's function within nineteenth-century metropolitan French textual narratives; in other words, how and why the *métisse* was imagined. We have observed the maintenance of rhetorical modes of signification that seek to imprint upon the textualised body of the *métisse* definitive marks of difference in an effort to master them through knowledge and identification. However, the striking paradox inherent in the representation of the *métisse* is her protean identity which makes her both desirable and deceptive, both reassuringly identifiable and knowable, and alarmingly other. Any portrait of the *métisse* is bound up in ambivalence and paradox. Transparent and hidden, destructive and creative, identifiable and unknowable, passively displayed and sexually proactive, the *métisse* seems to deconstruct all of the categories that attempt to delimit her. She is a site fraught with the contradictory pulls of fluid ambiguity and rigid certitude. The contours of her dangerously different and erotic body are displayed in the body of the texts studied in order to fulfil the two primary narrative functions of the *métisse*: to seduce and to devastate.

The *métisse*, then, belongs to a category of woman that has existed since Antiquity – the *femme fatale*. All of the depictions of the *métisse* we have examined rely on this classic motif to describe her malign sexuality that can lead to tragedy in the form of contamination, dilution, or death. While Sue explicitly suggests that her mortal power is a function of her status as a *fille de couleur*, all of the authors racialise the nature of the *métisse's* sexuality as they describe her as a *natural* prostitute or courtesan, and thus place her within a discourse of deviancy and degeneration that articulates the contemporary concern of the effacement of differential identity – based on class, race, and gender. Furthermore, the association of the *métisse* with the courtesan provides a justification for displaying

the coloured female body on the page and for her ventriloquised body to speak explicitly about sex, be it under the guise of moral truisms or 'ethnographic' study. In the case of Loti's colonial novel, the *métisse* as prostitute emblemises the availability (sexual, territorial, and political) of the coloured races in the face of white conquest.

As we saw in our study of Gobineau, there exists in his writing a profound fear of the blurring of class boundaries within Europe and the levelling of nobility in favour of mediocre egalitarianism. His effort to identify the normative standard – white, aristocratic, male – is contingent upon his identification of the Other. The *métisse* not only becomes a powerful figure of alterity, her ability to pass as white signifies the threat of contamination and the spread of degeneration from *within* the system. White masculinity – and with it the image of healthy, restrained, and productive sexuality – is contrasted by a woman whose sexuality is unhealthy, unrestrained, and unproductive. Her deviant sexuality is shown time and time again to deplete and weaken her partner: white masculinity – a powerful component of national European identities, according to George Mosse – is under threat by the deceptive similitude of this ultimately Other woman. Furthermore, it is her ability to infiltrate the system – to pass – that demonstrates the precarious nature of typologically demarcated identities premised on a reliable relationship between exterior signs and interior essence and behaviour. In other words, she is a threat not only to the 'purity' of white masculinity but also to the system, which creates and upholds it. This is why we see in Loti's colonial novel the excision of the *métisse* as anathema because she blurs the racial binarism upon which the colonial ethos is established. In order to account for the tragic downfall of the white hero in his unhealthy relationship with Africa, the *métisse* must be seen as fundamentally black to maintain the necessary racial distinctions.

In all of the novelistic texts, the hapless white male victim lacks the knowledgeable eye of the narrator and finds himself destroyed by the concupiscence the *métisse*

inspires. What is at issue in all of these texts is the white male gaze – be it erotic, taxonomic, and/or poetic – upon the coloured female object, the *métisse*. It is in this gaze vector that power is established: the subject who gazes has power over the object upon whom the gaze is levelled. For instance, Loti's character, Jean is finally freed of his blinding lust for Cora when he witnesses her bestial depravity through the bedroom window. His gaze successfully unmasks her and presents to the reader her 'true' nature. However, as we have seen, the gaze holds within it a possibility of power inversion, at least on a textual and discursive level. The gaze, which should empower the gazer to know and understand (and thus have mastery over) the object of perusal, is attenuated by the *métisse*'s hidden or contradictory signs of difference, as well as by her ability to cloud reason with lust. Ferrand, as voyeur, is enslaved by Cecily's carefully orchestrated performance; the speaker in 'Les Bijoux' loses control over his narrative as the exotic coloured woman seduces him before his eyes. I have discussed the fundamental difference between these two examples, namely that in the former, narrative control is never relinquished over the female object, something that can be disputed in a reading of 'Les Bijoux'. Nevertheless, what both texts demonstrate is the precarious balance of power between white male subject and coloured female object. As we saw most clearly in Anne McClintock's exposition of Jan van der Straet's drawing, the feminine exotic, painted as erotic and passive to white male dominion and possession, threatens with possible emasculation and dismemberment.

The tragic sadomasochism in Gobineau's model of interracial relations seems to be at work more generally in all of these texts that produce a woman whose particular form of alterity marks her as deviant and degenerative, while at the same time making her infinitely attractive in her deviancy. Gobineau argues that the dynamic of conquest intrinsic to the contact between the white conquering race and the coloured conquered race is both noble and necessary since it allows for the creation of civilisation, before, of course, it is threatened by inevitable degeneration. The element of nobility in the face of inexorable and tragic

contamination and debasement that we notice in Gobineau's essay finds a distinctive re-articulation in the artistic development Laurent undergoes in *Thérèse Raquin.* The Decadent valorisation of degeneration as a prerequisite for artistic sophistication turns the *métisse* into a symbol not simply of destruction but also (if briefly) of creation.

In this thesis, I have examined both the fictional representation of the *métisse* and the fictionalisation of the 'real life' *métisse*, in the case of Jeanne Duval. My object is to demonstrate the power of the authorial pen to imprint upon the female body and the textual body the imaginings of the author whose 'erotic desire and desire to know converge in writing'.[385] I am reminded of Balzac's statement, 'Le papier et la femme sont deux choses blanches qui souffrent tout'.[386] For Peter Brooks, the implication of this observation is that woman – like paper – is inscribed and penetrated by men. As we have seen most vividly in the case of *Thérèse Raquin*, the authorial pen can likewise colour the female body within the text as Zola does in the revision of his novel. In a less dramatic but by no means less significant way, Sue and Loti similarly mark their *métisse* characters with signs of colour: matte complexions, tinted eyes and fingernails, all are added to colour the body displayed in their texts, to mark it as different and to justify its titillating exhibition. The pen, then, inscribes, penetrates, colours, and marks the body that it creates on the page. I find that this image provides us with an interesting way of viewing the deliberate and constructed nature of racial colouring, particularly when the signs of colour are, themselves, admittedly tenuous and contradictory in these texts.

Just as paper is imprinted by the narrative imaginings of the author, so too is woman; as in the cases of Jeanne Duval and Saartjie Baartman, where two coloured women are turned into embodiments of their textual representation. The

[385] Brooks, *Body Work*, 22.
[386] In Balzac, *Pensées, sujets, fragments*, ed. Jacques Crépet (Paris: Blaizot, 1910) 45, cited in Brooks, 84.

historical figure of Jeanne is appropriated by generations of Baudelaire's readers and turned into a figure of simple-minded depravity, whose exotic and perverse seductive power over the poet is tinged with tragedy. This simplistic portrait – gleaned from a selective and skewed reading of Baudelaire's writings – is rather a product of the collective imagination of his readership. There is no way to reach through the layers of textual constructions of Jeanne to a 'real' historical person. Our conception of her has been mediated through so many appropriations of and projections upon her body and 'persona' that her portrait tells us more about her 'authors' than about her. The creation of the 'Vénus noire' figure and its inscription upon a selection of Baudelaire's poetry suggests that our ability to see and to ascribe meaning is socially constructed, and that much of what we 'encounter' in a text is what we have brought there. The construction and maintenance of conceptions of gender and race come from a productive interaction of cultural discourse, authorial craft, and reader reception. The case of Jeanne demonstrates that the process of stereotype is not limited to a literary past. The surprising longevity of her portrait suggests that the mythology of Jeanne, grounded in the thematic paradoxes and ambiguities we have encountered in all of these representations of the *métisse*, maintains a singular currency that extends considerably beyond the scope of the nineteenth century.

The mythology of Jeanne provides us with a striking example of the implication of readership in the narrative display of the *métisse*. We are involved in the process of scrutiny and valuation. To broach the issue of identity construction, we must acknowledge the implicit relationship that we maintain with the text that produces and displays the *métisse*. It is only in so doing that we can begin to unwind the strands of cultural assumptions, fears and desires that are entangled around this ambiguous and paradoxical figure who so captured the imagination of nineteenth-century metropolitan French literature as well as subsequent critical reading, and whose ambivalent identity still has much to tell us about our own understanding of racial and sexual alterity.

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